A Doctoral Dissertation Research

Submitted to the Faculty of Argosy University San Francisco Bay Area

In partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

By

Nasr D. Abdrabo

September 2013

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September 2013

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Abstract of Doctoral Dissertation Research

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September 2013

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program during Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide recommendations about the improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future. The researcher conducted a descriptive qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to illuminate and identify the beliefs of the participants in this study about the strengths, weaknesses, as well as their recommendations on the current Special Assistance Program. Thirty informants were recruited from the three Arabic schools located at DLIFLC: 10 from UMA, 10 participants from UMB, and 10 participants from UMC. The participants were recruited voluntarily from the four U.S. military services: Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps. The informants participated in 3 focus-group sessions. A researcher-developed instrument was used in this study; 8 semi-structured questions that were addressed to the participants during each focus group session. The study had three conclusions: The participants in the current Special Assistance Program believed in the strengths of this program and believed it can help them overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges which caused them to be placed in this program; participants saw some deficiencies in this program and believed these deficiencies can hinder them in overcoming the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges that have caused them to be placed in this program; and participants provided some recommendations which they believed, if conveyed to DLIFLC management, can be used in developing this program to help future SA

participants overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges that may cause them be placed in this program.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply indebted to all Argosy University professors who accompanied me during my doctoral journey since September 2009. I'd like to mention here Dr. Scott Grifith and Dr. Barbara Cole. It would have been more challenging to finish my doctoral journey without the sincere, loyal support of those who helped my dream come true. Above all, I would like to thank my daughter; Reem and my son; Ahmed for their personal support and great patience all the time. My brother, Dr. Ibrahim, my sister, Dr. Nefisa, my brother–in-law, Dr. Mohamed Atteya, and my Godfather, General Ibrahim Basyouni, who has constantly given me unequivocal support.

This dissertation would not see the light without the help and support of my committee chair, Dr. Afriye Quamina. Dr. Quamina's good advice, support, dedication, energy, and hard work have played outstandingly in the success of this dissertation. Dr. Mary Lespier; my second committee member, was always there supporting me with her invaluable advice and guidance. My special thanks to Dr. Christine Campbell, Associate Provost, who never got tired of reviewing my work. Dr. Campbell has been the milestone in the success of this study.

I am truly indebted to Dr. Betty Leaver; DLIFLC Provost for her invaluable academic, professional guidance, and her unparalleled support to the topic of my dissertation. Dr. Donald Fischer; DLIFLC former Provost, though away from DLI site, still in my mind and memory for his encouragement and great support since I joined DLI in 2006 till his retirement in 2012. I would like also to express my sincere appreciation to

Dr. Jim Zhao, Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education, for his diligent efforts in facilitating my data collection process.

In this respect, I'd like also to thank Dr. Gordon Jackson, Dr. Heejong Yi, Dr. Jeffrey Crowson, Dr. Hiam Kanbar, UMA Dean, Dr. Janet Edwards, UMB Dean, and Dr. Marina Cobb, UMC Dean, as well as the 30 military personnel who accepted to serve voluntarily in this study as subjects. Finally, I want to thank all my colleagues in the three Arabic schools who facilitated selecting the participant informants for this study, and specifically, Dr. Foazi Elbarouki from UMC, Ms. Pascale Koayess from UMB, and UMA Chief MLI.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my father, Dakhly Abdelrazek

Abdrabo who passed away in Egypt in 1971 without my being able to attend his funeral,
my mother, Aleya Ahmed Salem who passed away in Egypt in 1977, and my brother

Mohamed who passed in Egypt in 2005 while I was in the States. May God rest their
souls in Paradise.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview of the Study

The Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) located at the Presidio of Monterey (POM) California, is characterized by unique goals and mission: To provide selected military and government personnel with quality foreign language instructional programs that ensure sound delivery of precise and various foreign language skills in different modalities: reading, listening and speaking, as well as other target language (TL) needs that will guarantee meeting U.S. varied military positions throughout the world.

The Arabic Basic Course (ABC) is the course of Master Standard Arabic (MSA) that is taught at DLIFLC. This course is comprised of three semesters: Semester One (units 1-4), Semester Two (units 5-10) and Semester Three (units 11-15), and each unit consists of 5 chapters. At the end of each chapter and unit, the MSA student should score (or exceed) level C in any of the language skills: listening comprehension (LC), reading comprehension (RC), and speaking (SP). The student is also required to maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0 (out of 4.0) to demonstrate satisfactory academic progress.

Students who make less than this satisfactory progress in acquiring foreign language skills, whether these skills are tested (listening, reading and speaking) or untested (writing) in chapter/unit tests, are placed in Special Assistance Program (SAP) sessions: 20-22 sessions a month given to the student during the seventh teaching hour (Monday-Friday from 2:55-3:45 p.m.). When the student takes the next chapter/unit test and meets the proficiency requirement—a grade of C in the named skill/GPA of 3.0—the

student is removed from SAP and returns to the normal learning schedule (7:55-2:55 p.m.).

This study was designed to investigate learner beliefs about the strengths and weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program (SAP) in semester one, and to provide suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

During the process of second language acquisition (SLA), learners often encounter challenges as they move from the basic to intermediate to the advanced levels of language proficiency. These challenges or learning difficulties may impede the learners from accomplishing learning tasks or objectives. L2 learners who encounter learning challenges typically need instructional assistance from their language instructor or more knowledgeable classmates who are studying the target language in the same learning setting.

The instructional assistance is given during the social interaction—in class and/or out of class -- between the assistance provider, whether the language instructor or more knowledgeable peer, and the learner. This instructional assistance is intended to help the learner acquire the ability to accomplish learning tasks or objectives on his/her own, with minimal or no external assistance.

Wood et al. (1976) identified instructional assistance as "scaffolding" and characterized it as "a process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts." According to Wood et al., scaffolding essentially consists of "the adult 'controlling' those elements of

the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (p. 90).

The researcher conducted a descriptive qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to investigate and document the beliefs of the participants in this study—30 DLIFLC students of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) who are on Special Assistance in semester one of the Arabic Basic Course. The participants were recruited from the three Arabic schools located at DLIFLC: 10 students from Undergraduate Middle East School II (UMA), 10 students from Undergraduate Middle East School III (UMB) and 10 students from Undergraduate Middle East School III (UMC). During the data collection process the researcher used one data-collection method: a focus-group session during which the participants expressed their beliefs about the strengths and weaknesses of the current SA Program that might affect their learning proficiency levels in listening, reading, speaking and writing. During the focus-group session, the researcher also elicited recommendations from the participants that may provide DLIFLC management with information that can be used to improve the effectiveness of the SA Program in the future.

The participants in this study were recruited on a volunteer basis among the students who were placed in the SA Program because of their poor academic performance in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), specifically, a GPA of below 3.0 out of 4.0 or a test score below C in any skill: listening, reading, speaking and/or writing. During the SA Program, the participants are required to attend 20-22 one-hour sessions; Monday through Friday during the last hour of the class day, from 2:55 to 3:45 P.M.

Statement of the Problem

The Special Assistance Program (SAP) which is conducted at DLIFLC has as its goal assisting students who make less than satisfactory progress in acquiring foreign language skills. This program is required for students who score below level "C" in any tested skill or those who have a GPA below 3.0 out of 4.0. During SAP sessions, the participants receive targeted instructional assistance (scaffolding) from the instructor(s) to promote their proficiency in specific language skill(s).

Students who have been in the program for a month or more (20-22 sessions or more) were assumed to be in a position to comment on its strengths and weaknesses, and to recommend improvements in it. Investigating the beliefs of SAP participants can provide the DLIFLC management with information that can potentially be used to improve the Special Assistance Program.

Background of the Study

DLIFLC teaches 26 foreign languages in courses that range from 26 to 64 weeks based on the difficulty of these languages for native speakers of English. The students are assigned to study the target language based on the scores they earn on the Defense Language Aptitude Test (DLAB), which measures aptitude to learn a foreign language: the student earning a score of 95 is assigned to learn a foreign language under category I in a 26-week basic course in languages such as French or Italian, students earning a score of 100 fall under category II and study a 36-week basic course in languages such as Indonesian or Germany and students under category III are those who earn a score of 105 and are assigned to study a target language such as Farsi or Turkish in a 47-week basic

course, while the students earning a score of 110 fall under category IV and study one of the most difficult languages for a native speaker of English, such as Arabic, Chinese, Korean, Japanese or Pashto in a 64-week basic course, which is the longest basic language course in the DLIFLC learning setting.

In addition to interacting with the MSA native-speaker (NS) instructor, the student interacts with class peers during six class sessions per instructional day, each class lasting 50 minutes, during which the students participate in a variety of learning activities that integrate the main second language (L2) learning skills: listening, reading and speaking. The student may also have face-to-face interaction with the native instructor in a special-assistance (SA) session.

Furthermore, the student has a good opportunity to interact with an instructor during the DLIFLC's after-school, voluntary assistance program that is known within the DLI setting as Study Hall (SH), the main goal of which is to enhance the student's proficiency in the target language. In addition, the student has the opportunity to interact with Oral-Proficiency Interview (OPI) native-instructor specialists in the Speaking Club program held in the Arabic schools for the students striving to enhance their speaking skill in MSA.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide suggestions to

DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

To accomplish this purpose, the researcher elicited the participants' beliefs about the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in semester one, as well as their recommendations about what would help SA future participants benefit at the most from this program.

The Researcher's Conceptual Framework

Students' complex forms of thinking have their origins in their social interactions, which provide them with more opportunities to acquire new cognitive skills through participating with peers/instructors in socially mediated activities within a collaborative learning environment. When students learn in an environment designed on the basis that learning is a transaction that takes place solely inside the head, they remain unassisted or unmediated, thus deprived of the opportunity of accomplishing the learning task with the new knowledge or perceptions that can help them construct collaboratively when they interact with peers in the same learning setting.

Interaction in L2 acquisition "creates conditions to facilitate language acquisition or makes incidental acquisition rather than intentional acquisition" (Ziglari, 2008, p. 447). According to Krashen's input hypothesis (IH), input, simplified input and interaction are three significant ways to obtain comprehensible input which is necessary for acquisition (Ellis, 1999, cited in Ziglari, 2008, p. 447 Krashen, 1987;). Based on Krashen's IH, Lantolf (2000, cited in Ziglari, 2008) argued that second language acquisition (SLA) is viewed as "the process that occurs in the mind of learners rather than

in the people-embedded activity" and Ziglari (2008) asserts that "interaction is a form of mediation through which learners construct new forms and functions collaboratively" (p. 448).

Vygotsky (1978) argued that context-dependent and social interaction is primary in language acquisition, and meaning is socially constructed and emerges out of the learner interactions with his/her environment (Kaufman, 2004, cited in Ziglari, 2008, p. 448). Moss (2003) claimed that "empirical research with second language learners supports the contention that engaging in language interactions facilitates second language development" (p. 1). Mackey's study, conducted to address the issue of the relationship between interaction and second language development, asserted, "the nature of interaction and the role of the learner are critical factors along with the type of structure that may be affected through interaction" (Mackey, 1999, cited in Ziglari, 2008, p. 449) and that interaction "can increase the pace of acquisition (Moss, 2003, p. 1)

According to Castro (2010), Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996) made great contributions to second language acquisition (p. 175). This hypothesis posits, "interaction facilitates comprehension and acquisition of semantically contingent speech and negotiation for meaning" and "stresses the importance of the interactional modifications that occur in negotiating meaning" (Castro, 2010, p. 176).

Classroom interactional tasks such as learner classroom participation, group work, teacher talk, and role-playing are among the language learning activities that stimulate negotiation for meaning, and are among the easiest ways to facilitate a learner's focus on form. Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT) also posits that communication

and interaction are the purpose of language learning (Castro, 2010, p. 176). One of the main purposes of designing CLT is "to reflect the learners' needs and engage them in inclass communicative interaction" (Anton 1999, cited in Moussa, 2010, p. 2). Kavanagh (2012) stated that CLT "had a profound shift on language teaching and is widely seen as the starting point of what has been deemed the communicative revolution" (p. 730). This theory, viewed as an approach to language teaching, is characterized by its main aims and theory as a reflection of a communicative perspective on language that can be used as profound support to an unlimited number of classroom procedures, including varied communicative activities, which help the student focus on completing tasks, solving problems collaboratively with peers, as well as communicating meaningfully in the target language (Kavanagh, 2012, p. 732).

Educators assert that CLT is one of the best researched of all teaching strategies (Widdowson, 1990, cited in Rezaee & Aziz, 2012, p. 52) and an approach to teaching that makes maximum use of cooperative activities involving pairs and small groups of learners in the classroom, a group learning activity that is organized to produce dependent learning classroom based on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups; a positive learning environment in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others. (Richards & Rodgers 2001, cited in Rezaee & Aziz, 2012, p. 52)

In an L2 learning setting adopting CLT, the teacher plays the role of the facilitator throughout a discussion where he or she is not the only authoritarian source of knowledge (Nunan 1988, 1989 cited in Moussa, 2010, p. 2). In such instructional environment the

learners perform as group independent communicators, who share the same responsibility of learning that takes place through interaction where they support each other to reach higher learning achievements (Anton 1999; Nunan 1988, cited in Moussa, 2010, pp. 2-3; Savignon & Wang 2003). Educators argue that the practice of in-class oral communication proved positive results in second language acquisition, not only for the speaking and listening tasks but for writing and reading ones as well (Wang 1990, cited in Moussa, 2010, p. 3).

Theoretical Foundations

Two theories correlated to this study: Sociocultural Theory of Mind (SCT) theorized by the Russian psychologist Vygotsky in the 1930s and Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT).

Sociocultural Theory of Mind (SCT)

Sociocultural theory of mind developed by Vygotsky (1896-1934) argued that learner's complex forms of thinking have their origins in the learner's social interactions [through mediation] rather than in the learner's private explorations: A learner acquires new cognitive skills when receiving guidance from teachers or more capable peers (Sams, n.d.). This external, targeted language assistance, which Vygotsky referred to in his zone of proximal development (ZPD) was introduced and termed as "scaffolding" by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (1976, p. 90).

To create an appropriate learning experience (Sams, n.d.) argued that a scaffolder must gain and keep the learner's [whether child or novice] attention, model the best strategy, and adapt the whole process to the learner's level in his or her zone of proximal

development. In other words, "scaffolding" should be provided within what the learner can perform independently and what he or she cannot perform in the absence of this targeted assistance.

According to Vygotsky, the Sociocultural Theory (SCT) is an approach to learning and mental development through the potential interaction between individuals and their surrounding environment. Utilizing the existing cultural artifacts within their surrounding environment, humans develop new cultural artifacts that assist them in directing their biological and behavioral activities (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006B, p. 201). Lantolf (n.d.) stated that SCT was established on a fundamental concept that the humans mind is 'mediated': This interpretation was adapted from the Vygotskian argument that humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labor activity which promotes humans' inspiration to change the circumstances under which they live in the world around them using symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate their relationships with others and themselves to change the nature of these relationships (p. 1).

The Core Concepts of Sociocultural Learning Theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory consists of four core concepts: mediation, internalization, imitation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). These four core concepts are intertwined, inevitable steps that occur during the learning process.

Mediation. Vygotsky, who stated that the human mind is comprised of a lower-level neurological base, highlighted that the distinctive dimension of human consciousness is its capacity for voluntary control over this level by using 'higher-level

cultural tools' as language, literacy, numeracy, categorization, rationality, and logic.

These 'higher-level cultural tools' represent "a buffer between the person and the environment and act to mediate the relationships between the individual and the social-material world" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A, p. 199)

Internalization. Internalization is another core concept of SCT during which cultural artifacts, such as language, take on a psychological function. Internalization is defined as "a negotiated process that recognizes the relationship of the individual to her or his social environment and generally carries it into future performance" (Wynegar, 1997, cited in Lantolf & Throne, 2006A, p. 203). This process is seen as "the essential element in the formation of higher mental functions" (Kozulin, 1990, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A, p. 203) is responsible for the organic connection between the individual's mental activity and his or her social communication, and represents the mechanism through which the individuals gain control over their brains (Yaroshevsky, 1989, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A, p. 203). The Vygotskian interpretation of internalization is that "Every psychological function appears twice, first between people on the interpsychological plane and then within the individual on the intrapsychological plane" (Vygotsky, 1978, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A, p. 203).

Imitation. Disregarding the typical meaning of 'imitation' commonly known as mindless mimicking that often associated with behaviorism in psychology and the audio-lingual method in language pedagogy, Lantolf & Thorne (2006A) defined 'imitation' differently based on the Vygotskian theory as "it [imitation] involves goal directed cognitive activity that can result in transformations of the original model" (p. 203).

Vygotsky argued, "development based on collaboration and imitation is the source of all the specifically human characteristics of consciousness that develop in the child" and that 'imitation' is "the source of instruction's influence on development" (Vygotsky, 1987, pp. 210-211, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A, p. 204)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

According to Vygotsky, the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is:

...the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978B, p. 86)

Lantolf and Thorne (2006A, p. 207) argue that ZPD is a model of the developmental process, as well as a conceptual tool that educators can use by to understand aspects of their students' emerging capacities that are in early stages of maturation. ZPD is also seen a diagnostic tool, when used proactively by teachers, can help them create learning conditions for their students to promote their cognitive development in the future. According to Lantolf & Thorne, (2006B) learners traverse three stages of self-direction or regulation in their cognitive-development process:

Object-Regulation Stage: This is the first stage of the learner's cognitive-development process where the learner is often controlled by, or uses, objects in the learning setting like pictures, visual aids, or body language.

Other-Regulation Stage: In this second stage the learner is supported implicitly or explicitly by mediations that involve different levels of external instructional assistance, direction, or what is technically known in the L2 domain as scaffolding, and

Self-Regulation Stage: When the learner reaches this last stage of his or her cognitive development, the learner becomes able to accomplish the learning activities with minimal or no external support (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006B, pp. 199-200).

According to Ratner (2002, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A), Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) "argues that human mental functioning is fundamentally a mediated process that is organized by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts" (p. 197), and "while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher order thinking, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within these social and material environments" (p. 198).

Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT)

Based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Long's Interaction
Hypothesis Theory, second language learning can happen through in-class interaction and
oral communication (Moussa, 2010, p. 1). Long's theory argues that the interactional
collaboration among peers can lead to second language (L2) acquisition and that when L2
learners communicate through interaction, they are most likely to achieve better levels of
comprehension of the new input (Ellis 1999, 1998, 1995; Ellis 1997, cited in Moussa,
2010, p. 1; Long 2006). On the other hand, Vygotsky's perspective of collaborative
assistance (scaffolding) between an expert and a novice, or among peers, which is offered
or received during interaction, can create more opportunities for L2 learning (Mitchell
and Myles 2004; Lantolf and Appel 1994, cited in Moussa, 2010, p. 1). Accordingly, the
interaction during L2 acquisition is argued to serve "as the first step of cognitive
development where the learners are assisted in focusing their attention on the new input

according to the targeting structure of the lesson" (Gass 1997, cited in Moussa, 2010, p. 5).

From the general scope of Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT) "the communicative curriculum is especially designed to reflect the learners' needs and engage them in in-class communicate interaction" (Anton 1999, cited in Moussa, 2010, p. 2). CLT theory "was conceived from a sociolinguistic approach to language learning that stresses on emphasis on activities that engage the student in language use that is more meaningful and authentic" (Kavanagh, 2012), p. 730).

The primary goal of CLT is for learners to develop communicative competence and to make use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. Based on the CLT perspective, communicative competence is defined as the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behavior that requires the learners' active involvement in producing the target language. According to Principles of Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Instruction (2007), communicative competence encompasses four subcompetences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (pp. 5-6). Richards (2006) defined these sub-competences as follows:

- Linguistic competence: the learner's knowledge of how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions,
- 2. Sociolinguistic competence: the learner's knowledge of how to vary the use of language according to the setting and the participants. In other words when formal

- and informal language are used appropriately, as well as when the language is used appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication,
- Discourse competence: the learner's knowledge of how to produce and differentiate the types of texts: narratives, reports, interviews and conversations, and
- 4. Strategic competence: the leaner's ability to use different kinds of communication strategies to maintain communication despite having limitations in his/her language knowledge. (p. 3)

CLT aims to promote the development of real-life language skills, and highlights engaging the learner in contextualized, meaningful, and communicative-oriented learning tasks. CLT includes eight methodologies or principles that embrace an eclectic approach to teaching:

- 1. Using tasks as an organizational principle,
- 2. Promoting learning by doing.
- 3. Enriching input.
- 4. Input needs to be meaningful, comprehensible, and elaborated.
- 5. Promoting cooperative and collaborative learning.
- 6. Focusing on form.
- 7. Providing effective error feedback.
- 8. Recognizing and respecting affective factors of learning. (Principles of communicative language teaching and task-based instruction, 2007, pp. 7-21)

Richards (2006) provides ten core assumptions, which shed more light on the importance of adopting CLT as a strategy and approach for L2 instruction or a curriculum development framework in the L2 acquisition spectrum:

- Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
- 2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchanges.
- Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
- 4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
- 5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by activities involving language analysis and reflection.
- 6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language, and trial and error.
- 7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
- 8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.

- 9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conductive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and learning.
- 10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing. (pp. 22-23)

Tan (2005) defines three types of techniques that are usually embedded in CLT: "information gap, role-play and tasks" stating that the goal of these communicative techniques essentially is to get the students to interact in a language learning classroom (p. 105). Richards (2006) provides a considerable list of classroom activities that can be carried out in a language classroom adopting CLT such as:

- 1. Accuracy vs. fluency activities.
- 2. Mechanical, meaningful, and communicative practice.
- 3. Information-gap activities.
- 4. Jigsaw activities.
- 5. Task-completion activities.
- 6. Information-gathering activities.
- 7. Opinion-sharing activities.
- 8. Information-transfer activities.
- 9. Reasoning-gap activities.
- 10. Role-plays. (pp. 14-20)

Richards argues that carrying out these varied types of activities in a language learning classroom will provide the students with more opportunities: to learn from hearing the language used by other members in the group, to produce a greater amount of language than they would use in teacher-fronted activities, increase their motivational level, and to have more opportunities to develop fluency (p. 20).

Assumptions

A1: Participants in the current Special Assistance Program believe in the strengths of this program and think it can help them overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges which caused them to be placed in this program.

A2: Participants in the current Special Assistance Program see some deficiencies in this program and believe these deficiencies can hinder them in overcoming the listening, reading, speaking, and writing challenges that have caused them to be placed in this program.

A3: Participants in the current Special Assistance Program have some recommendations which they believe, if conveyed to DLIFLC management, can be used in developing this program to help future SA participants overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges that may cause them be placed in this program.

Research Questions

RQ1: What do learners see as the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ2: What do learners see as the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ3: What recommendations do learners believe would improve the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

Definition of Terms

The following terms were used in this study:

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching Theory was designed to reflect learners' needs and engage them in in-class communicative interaction.

FORTE: Family, Occupation, Recreation, Travel and Education: Five topics that are requested from DLIFLC students to speak about as brainstorming during speaking sessions before delving into speaking in a specific topic.

Imitation: In this study, this refers to DLI students' actions imitating instructors, peers, or colleagues in target-language learning activities that can result in enhancing their proficiency in the language skills.

Internalization: The student's mental linguistic activity resulting from his or her interaction with instructors or peers in the same learning setting.

L2: The foreign language that the student learns and uses in the classroom and outside the classroom when interacting with native speakers of this language. If the language is only used in the classroom for learning purposes, it is called just "foreign language".

Mediation: The tool that connects the learners to their learning environment.

Object-regulation stage: The first stage of linguistic-cognitive development where the students are still object-oriented learners who rely on pictures, visual aids, or body language to recognize new words or directions.

Other-regulation stage: The second stage of linguistic-cognitive development in which students still need external assistance or guidance whenever they encounter challenges in acquiring the target language.

Scaffolding: External instructional assistance that the learner receives from an instructor or more capable peer to perform a task successfully that would not be accomplished without this assistance.

Schema: The unique information or knowledge stored in the individual's longterm memory that was derived from the individual's experiences and cognitive processes.

SCT: Sociocultural Theory of Mind, theorized by Vygotsky in the 1930s.

Self-regulation stage: The third stage of linguistic-cognitive development in which the student becomes a self-directed learner who can perform a task at his or her own pace with minimal or no external assistance.

Semantic Encoding: The process of getting information into memory for storage, and a specific type of encoding in which the meaning of something (a word, phrase, picture, event, etc.) is encoded as opposed to its oral or visual form.

TTT: The acronym for Translation from Arabic to English, Translation from English to Arabic, and Transcription.

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): The distance between the level at which the students can perform a task independently and the level at which they become unable to perform a task without external assistance.

Limitations of the Study

The methodological limitations of this descriptive qualitative study resided in the following:

- 1. The analysis of the data derived from this qualitative research related to a small sample (30 participants), which can be seen as a weakness that may lessen the possibility of generalizability in other L2 learning settings (Bryman, 1988, cited in Carr, 1994, p.717).
- 2. The close relationship between the researcher as a DLIFLC faculty member and the subjects; DLIFLC students learning MSA in this descriptive qualitative study might complicate the research process and extend the responsibilities of the researcher. Sandelowski (1986, cited in Carr, 1994, p, 718) argues that this close relationship may lead to researchers having difficulty in separating their own experiences from those of their subjects: the researcher intended to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the SA program during Semester One of the Arabic Basic Course and to elicit the participants' recommendations of developments that can be made on this program in the future. On the other hand, the participants in this study may devaluate the academic value of this study since it will be conducted by a faculty member who affiliates to the DLIFLC management. As such, the participants may provide exaggerated responses during the data collection processes, which may affect the findings of this study whether positively or negatively.

Delimitations

This study was conducted at the DLIFLC: a military institute that is characterized by a special mission and goals, and accordingly might be inapplicable to universities or civil language institutes.

- 1. The participants of this study were recruited from students who are learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) during semester I of the Arabic Basic Course and who were placed in the SA program due to their poor academic performance in Modern Standard Arabic, specifically, a GPA of below 3.0 out of 4.0 or a test score below C in any skill: listening, reading, speaking and/or writing. Thus, investigating the perception and experience of these participants on the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Assistance Program during Semester I may or may not agree with the beliefs of participants assigned to the same program during semester II or III.
- 2. This study investigated the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Assistance Program from the perspectives of the participants, some of whom might be on probation and accordingly, could have negative view of the program.

Significance of the Study

 This study was designed to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Assistance Program from the perspectives of the participants who reflected their daily lived-experience with SA program in it.

- This study will provide DLIFLC management with the participants' recommendations for changes to maximize the effectiveness of this program for the benefit of future SA participants.
- This study will provide DLIFLC SA instructors and curriculum developers of what can be considered in developing future teaching strategies and curriculum development plans.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do learners see as the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ1: What do learners see as the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ3: What recommendations do learners believe would improve the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

Sociocultural Theory of Mind (SCT)

This theory was originally conceived by Vygotsky "during the years immediately following the Russian Revolution" (Lantolf, n.d.). Vygotsky's conception of conscious awareness and scientific concept are directly correlated with Lenin's conception of consciousness. Educators argue that this concept significantly grew from the Marxist, dialectical materialist tradition of analysis of science and society (Au, 2007) and that Vygotsky made use of Lenin's theory of reflection and activity (Davydov, 1988a, cited in Wayne Au, 2007; Wertsch 1985).

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of mind played a significant role in shaping the learning processes in numerous numbers of classes in Russia, Europe, and recently in the United States. This theory emphasized understanding human cognition and learning as social and cultural aspects rather than individual phenomena (Kozulin et al., 2003). American educators questioned about the reason of giving such great deal of concern, in the first decades of the 21st century, to a theory that was developed in the 1920s soon after the Russian revolution. Kozulin et al. provided an informative answer to this question stating that Vygotsky's theory provided rational answers to three critical questions: multiculturalism, mediation, and learning potential (Kozulin et al., 2003).

When Vygotsky developed sociocultural theory of mind, he meant to overcome what he characterized as a 'crisis in psychology' that arose – at his time – due to the diversity of perspectives between "behaviorism" which followed a natural science approach to research and sought out causes of psychological processes, and "psychoanalysis" which followed the humanistic tradition and emphasized description and understanding of mental activity. "Behaviorism" focused on studying the elementary, or biologically endowed mental processes that were, to great extent, automatic and included involuntary memory and attention, and reflex reaction to external stimuli. On the other hand, "psychoanalysis" as descriptive branch, focused on what Vygotsky named higher (mental) processes i.e. problem solving, voluntary memory and attention, rational thought, planning, and meaning-making activities.

Vygotsky argued that the relationship between individuals and their surrounding environment, or physical world, is psychologically mediated by 'concrete material tools',

thereby the individuals become able to change the world in which they live through transforming their social and material environment, as well as adapting themselves and the way they live in their world (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006A).

Sociocultural Theory (SCT) has significant impact on L2 acquisition and advocates learning through participation within socially mediated activities. The theory gears students' learning development to the zone of proximal development (ZPD) where the student receives instructional assistance or 'scaffolding' from the instructor or more capable peers, within mediation through internalization as a negotiated process to accomplish the learning activities, in a collaborative learning environment, that would not be accomplished if the student remains unassisted or unmediated (Turuk, 2008).

A lack of interaction in L2 learning setting deprives the opportunity of accomplishing the learning task with the knowledge they can construct collaboratively if they interact with peers in the same learning context (Klingner & Vaughn, 2000; Mercer, 2000; Swain, 2001 cited in Behroozizad et al., n.d.). Educators view this type of language learning classrooms as a source of problem for L2 learners who learn in an environment that "is designed on the view that learning is a transaction that happens solely 'inside the head.'

In a poor-communicative language learning setting, students are pushed "to the margins of classroom engagement and participation" (Gomez et al., 2010 cited in Behroozizad et al., n.d.). In such learning environment, the students have less opportunity to generate and develop language learning strategies in the process of communicating in their target language. As such, this poor-communicative learning

environment deprives the students from exchanging their varied learning processes and experiences, and shapes them as passive learners who depend on their teacher in the language learning process (Behroozizad et al., n.d.).

Vygotsky's SCT is significantly distinguished with its constructive contributions in the language development process when considering the pivotal role it plays in promoting the learning context by emphasizing the social process, interactions between the teacher as mediator, facilitator, and scaffolder and students, as well as the use of signs and tools as vehicles for constructing knowledge. These intertwined factors would profoundly result in enhancing the learners' abilities through the development of language learning strategies (Behroozizad et al, n.d.).

Sociocultural theories are valued as unique source of offering researchers theoretical perspectives that strengthen their endeavors in examining language learning as a social practice, view learners as active participants in constructing learning processes, and explore the interaction between different, intertwined factors involved (Kao, 2010). Educators extensively appreciate exploring the central concepts of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which has been constantly referred to in the field of second language research, including its core concepts; mediation, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), scaffolding, and self-regulation (Kao, 2010).

Mediation

Mediation is "to act as a peacemaker between opposing sides" (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 2007, cited in Kao, 2010). Mediation was viewed as a core concept in the Vygotskian sociocultural theory that represents the use of tools:

"things which are adopted to solve a problem or reach a goal" (Kao, 2010, p. 115), labor activity that allows people to change the world and the circumstances under which they live, and use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate their relationships with others and with themselves, whereby, they change the nature of these relationship.

These tools, whether physical or symbolic (psychological), are artifacts which "are created by human culture(s) over time and are made available to succeeding generations" (Lantolf, n.d.). Vygotsky argued that humans have the capacity to use symbols as tools to mediate their own psychological activity, and proposed that these symbolic tools are inwardly directed and "serve as an auxiliary means to control and recognize our biologically, endowed psychological processes" (Lantolf & Throne, 2006A). Language was among the symbolic tools of mediation in mental activities (Lantolf, 2000) utilized in directing and controlling the individual's physical behavior and mental activity (Kao, 2010).

Vygotsky did not believe in the behavioristic approach, which focused on studying the biologically endowed mental processes. He, instead, recognized and adopted the psychoanalysis approach, and interpreted the task of psychology as understanding the role played by the culturally constructed artifacts in organizing human social and mental activities. According to the Vygotsky's perception, the human mind was viewed as a functional system in which the properties of the natural, or biologically specified, brain are organized into a higher, or culturally shaped, mind through the integration of symbolic artifacts, as mediators, into thinking. Vygotsky viewed these higher mental capacities included in the human mind as "voluntary attention, intentional memory,

planning, logical thought and problem solving, learning, and evaluation of the effectiveness of these processes" (Lantolf, n.d.)

The Vygotskian theory stipulates the presence of mediating agents within the learner's interaction with the surrounding social environment for the favor of the learner's higher mental processes. Kozulin, (2003) argues that these mediation agents are represented by two forms:

1. Human mediation that concerns the involvement of the instructor or more capable peers, which effectively enhance the learner's performance. Vygotsky identified the human mediator based on his notion that the learner's cognitive development appears twice: first, in the interpersonal plane between the learner and the human mediator represented by the surrounding individuals, and second, within the learner's entity as an inner internalized form in the intrapersonal plane. The Vygotskian perspective elucidates how the learner's activities start as an interaction between the learner and the teacher, or more capable peers, become internalized as the learner's own psychological function (Kozulin, 2003).

The teacher mediating, in second language, may take forms of modeling, contingency management such as praise and critique, feedback, and cognitive structuring (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988 cited in Kozulin, 2003). The latter form of teacher mediating, cognitive structuring, is argued to be categorized under metacognitive level based on the rationale that it includes strategies that concern organizing the students' work (Kozulin, 2003).

Palinscar and Brown (1984 cited in Kozulin, 2003) proposed teaching framework for the development of literacy where teachers and students take turns in reading and discussing the text, thereby teachers use the interactive learning technique for developing students' questioning, summarizing, predicting, and clarifying strategies.

Rogoff's (1995 cited in Kozulin, 2003) analysis of mediation provides three distinguished aspects or strata of mediation:

Apprenticeship mediation provides a model of community activity that mediates sociocultural patterns to children or adult novices.

Guided participation mediation covers the interpersonal aspect of joint activity.

Appropriation mediation relates to changes occurring in the individuals due to their involvement in mediated activities.

2. Symbolic mediation that concerns the changes in the learner's performance that can be brought about by the introduction of symbolic tools mediators. Based on the Vygotskian SCT, there is significant distinction between the person with his or her environmental stimuli and their experiences developed by symbolic mediators (Vygotsky, 1978, 1997; Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1993, cited in Kozulin, 2003). Vygotsky introduced casting lots, tying knots, and counting fingers among the most ancient primitive symbolic mediators.

To analyze and classify different types of mediation, Kozulin (2003) argues that mediation can occur by distinguishing between the "type" and the "specific technique" of mediation. Based on the study of Bliss, Askew, and Macrae (1996) on scaffolding in science teaching, Kozulin argued that a teacher may "conclude that whereas approval,

encouragement, structuration, and organization of students' work are related to the *type* of mediation, more localized scaffolds such as the facilitation of the "first step" or provision of hints and slots are related to the *technique* of mediation" (Kozulin, 2003, p. 20).

However, Vygotsky introduced the vast areas of higher-order symbolic mediators: Different signs, symbols, writing, formulae, and graphic organizers (Kozulin, 2003). Based on the Vygotskian perspective, cognitive development and learning, ultimately rely on "the child's mastery of symbolic mediators, their appropriation and internalization in the form of inner psychological tools" (Kozulin, 1998, cited in Kozulin, 2003).

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in L2 Acquisition

In second language acquisition, the ZPD may be defined as "the site where the language is shared and internalized through mediation (Xiangui, 2005). This brief, yet informative definition of the ZPD was derived from the Vygotsky's definition of the ZPD as:

The distance between the actual development level as determined be independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers. (Vygotsky, 1978)

According to Tharp and Gallimore (1988), the zone of proximal development defines the immature functions that are currently in the process of maturation, and are expected to mature in the future since they are still in an embryonic state. These functions were termed "as "buds or flowers of development rather than the fruits of development" (p. 30).

The concept of the ZPD has been restated generally: The Vygotskian concept of the 'problem solving' was redefined as 'performance in other domains of competence' (Cazden, 1981; Rogoff & Wertsch, 1984, cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Tharp & Gallimore (1988) argued that "There is no single zone for each individual" and "For any domain of skill, the leaner's ZPD can be created" (p. 31). Educators argued that the learner has two types of ZPD: 'Culture Zone' and 'Individual Zone' due to "the cultural variations in the competencies that a child must acquire through social interaction in a particular society" (Rogoff, 1982 cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Accordingly, Tharp and Gallimore argue, "Whatever the activity, in the ZPD we find that assistance is provided by the teacher, the adult, the expert, the more capable peer" (p. 31). This argument derived from the Vygotskian view of how the role of interaction or mediation may affect the learning process:

Learning awakens a variety of internal development processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers. Once these processes are internalized, they become part of the child's independent achievement. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 90)

Tharp and Gallimore argue that it is crucial to distinguish the 'proximal zone' from the 'developmental level' by contrasting 'assisted' versus 'unassisted' performance which has significant implications for educational practice. This argument was established based on Vygotsky's evaluative insight of the effectiveness of teaching only when "it awakens and rouses to life those functions which are in a stage of maturing, which lies in the zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1956, p. 278 cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) developed a general definition of teaching as "Teaching consists in assisting performance through the ZPD and can occur when assistance is offered at points in the ZPD at which performance requires assistance" (p. 31). They also emphasized the notion that the development of any performance capacity in the individual represents a changing in the relationship between self-regulation and social regulation.

Tharp and Gallimore developed a model of four stages (figure 1) that presents progress through the ZPD, which "focuses particularly on the relationship between self-control and social control" (p. 33). A summary of this model follows:

Stage 1. During this stage the learner may have a very limited understanding of the task to be achieved. At this level the teacher or more capable peer offers directions or modeling, and the student's response is acquiescent or imitative. Then, the student gradually understands how the parts of the activity or the task relate to each other, as well as the meaning of the performance. The student's understanding, then, develops during the ongoing task performance, and when the student acquires some conceptions of the overall performance, through language or other semiotic mediation, the learner can be assisted by other means of assistance such as questions, feedback, or further cognitive structuring.

During Stage 1, the learner may not conceptualize the goal of the activity in the way the assistance provider (scaffolder) does, and while the interaction between both proceeds, different goals and sub-goals emerge and change as the participants, the scaffolder and the student, work together. During this interaction, the scaffolder may shift

to a subordinate or superordinate goal in response to ongoing assessment of the learner's performance, as well as their intersubjectivity.

During Stage 1, the scaffolder's responsibility for task performance steadily declines, with a reciprocal increase in the learner's proportion of responsibility. The developmental task of this stage is viewed as a 'transition' "from *other-regulation stage* to *self-regulation stage*" (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 35).

Stage 2. During this stage, the learner takes over the rules and responsibilities that have been previously divided between him or her and the scaffolder during Stage I. Wertsch (1979, cited in Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) stated that "The definitions of the situations and patterns of [the] activity which formerly allowed the child [and adult learner] to participate in the problem-solving effort on the interpsychological plane now allow him/her to carry out the task on the intrapsychological plane" (p. 36). This transition is viewed as self-control that "may be seen as a recurrent and efficacious method that bridges between help by others and fully automated, fully developed capacities" (p. 37).

Stage 3. During this stage 'self-regulation' no longer exists and has vanished, and the learner has already emerged from the ZPD into developmental stage for the task which execution is smooth and integrated, as well as automatized. The assistance, whether external from the scaffolder, or internal from the self, is no longer needed, but disruptive and irritating. This "is a stage beyond self-control and beyond social-control," and performance here is no longer developing since it is already developed (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988, p. 38).

Stage 4. During this stage the learner's lifelong learning is made up of the same ZPD sequences: from other-assistance to self-assistance – recurring over and over again for the development of new capacities. It is also argued that every individual, at any point in time, will be involved in a mix of other-regulation, self-regulation, and automated processes. To conclude, Tharp and Gallimore (1988) argue that when a performance is enhanced, improved, and maintained, a cycle of 'self-assistance' to 'other-assistance' emerges. "A most important consideration is that *de-automatization and recursion* occur so regularly that they constitute a Stage IV of the normal developmental process" (p. 39)

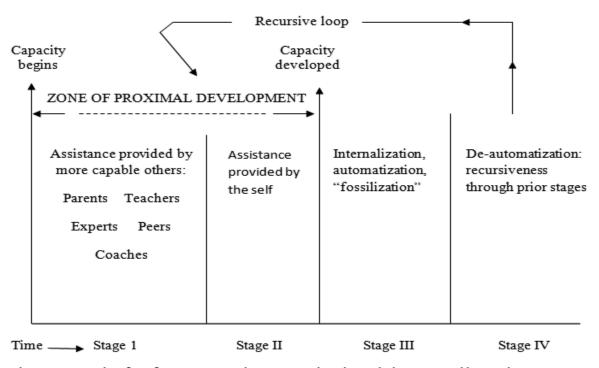


Figure 1 Genesis of performance capacity: progression through the ZPD and beyond Adapted from Tharp & Gallimore (1988, p. 35) (Figure 1)

Scaffolding

The abstract concept of scaffolding is borrowed from the building construction trade where scaffolding refers to temporarily erected structure used to support a building

that is under construction (Guoxing Yu, n.d, p. 7). "The scaffolding is gradually removed bit by bit as the building itself emerges and grows stronger and more stable" (Collins COBUILD English Dictionary cited in Guoxing Yu, n.d., p. 8). McKenzie (1999) argued that the term 'scaffolding' has no appropriate educational definition in a dictionary even though the concept of this term has been mentioned for a long time under other names. Some educators argue that scaffolding still has not yet been defined in a concrete manner and needs to be defined more specifically (Borthick et al. 2003, cited in Schwieter, 2010).

Many attempts have been made by a number of educators during the last decades trying to explain what scaffolding is through a variety of types of techniques (Schwieter, 2010) such as: Conceptual scaffolding (Bell & Davis, 1996), Soft and hard scaffolding (Holton & Clarke, 2006; Saye & Brush, 2002; Simons & Klein, 2007), Contingent scaffolding (van Lier, 1996), Reciprocal scaffolding (Holton & Clarke, 2006), Mutual scaffolding (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2000; Donato, 1994), Technical scaffolding (Yelland & Masters, 2007), and Hybrid learning scaffolding (Santoso, 2008). Scaffolding is also defined in a broader sense, as "the collaboration of both the learner and the expert operating within the learner's ZPD" (Nassaji and Swain 2000, cited in Guoxing Yu, n.d., p. 8).

Many other definitions of instructional scaffolding have been found in the spectrum of L2 acquisition: A "process that enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" that essentially consists of "the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only

those elements that are within his range of competence" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90) "the mediator's adjusting the complexity and maturity of the teaching interaction to facilitate [learner's] mastery of the task; providing support when necessary, and providing encouragement and prompts to the [learner] to move ahead when ready" (Lidz, 1991 cited in Schwieter, 2010), "the instructional assistance provided to the learner during problem solving in an educational context as a process whereby a teacher provides students with temporary framework for learning" (Lawson, 2002), an "assistance that not only helps a learner accomplish a task but rather 'help' which enables a learner to accomplish a task which they would not have been quite able to manage on their own...intended to bring the learner closer to a state of competence which will enable them to eventually complete such a task on their own" (Mercer & Stierer, 1992, cited in Booth, n.d.) and "a process by which a teacher provides students with a temporary framework for learning" and "an instructional technique whereby the teacher models the desired learning strategy or task and then gradually shifts responsibility to the students" (Veerappan et al., 2011, p. 934).

Verity (2005) views "scaffolding" from a different scope and defines it as "a crucial form of strategic mediation that should be offered to a learner contingent upon his need" (p. 4), and argues that this term, scaffolding, which is found in all sorts of language teaching materials, is often used inaccurately to refer to any and all kinds of help provided to the learner such as: hints, glosses, keys, graphics, definitions, lists of possible answers, suggestions for how to proceed, blanks, instructions, as well as the many other ways of help provided by teachers to help learners accomplish tasks, should not be considered as sorts of scaffolding.

Verity (2005) stipulates that the term scaffolding "should be limited to describing the cognitive support given to a novice learner to reduce the cognitive load of the task," and that "To scaffold a task is to take over the part of a task that is cognitively beyond the learner, so that he is free to focus on what he can do independently" (p. 4).

Scaffolding in L2 acquisition is viewed as the language used by an interlocutor to assist another speaker's communicative success regarding the provision of missing vocabulary or the expansion of his incomplete sentence (Lightbown & Spada 2006, cited in Booth, n.d.) and the teacher's means to provide children with cognitive and language support through a task to help them learn (McKay 2006, cited in Booth, n.d.). These two views of scaffolding have been consolidated by Booth (n.d.) as "the cognitive or language assistance a more knowledgeable other provides toward the intended completion of a task – a task that is beyond the learner's capability to complete alone but within his or her range of linguistic competence (p. 8).

Wells (1999, cited in Booth, n.d) referred to scaffolding as a way of 'operationalizing' Vygotsky's (1978) concept of working within the zone of proximal development: "the distance between the actual developmental level [of a learner] as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

Ohta (2001, cited in Booth, n.d.) reintroduced the ZPD and scaffolding for L2 learners as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by individual linguistic production, and the level of potential development as determined

through language produce collaboratively with a peer or a teacher". Scaffolding and a learner's ZPD have been linked by Lantolf & Poehner, who argued that the full understanding of a learner's ZPD is questionable since we need first to discover his or her ZPD, and accordingly, "performance on an aptitude test of any type, including language, is not complete until we observe how the person behaves in response to assistance" (Lantolf & Poehner 2003, cited in Booth, n.d.)

Scaffolding as a Formative Assessment Tool

Educators view scaffolding and formative assessment as two strategies that teachers can use to move students forward to learn within their zone of proximal development. Scaffolding and formative assessment are viewed as a collaborative process that involves negotiation of meaning between teacher and learner about expectations and how best to improve students' performance. While "formative assessment uses insights about a learner's current understanding to alter the course of instruction and thus supports the development of greater competence (Shepard, 2005), scaffolding may prove crucial to the effective implementation of assessing the complex needs of L2 learners and confirms its important role in identifying a learner's potential (Booth, n.d.).

Formative assessment and instructional scaffolding are viewed the same in the light of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of development (SCT) and one of its core components; the zone of proximal development based on the fact that both occur in the midst of instruction. L2 educators argue that scaffolding conducts the same function that formative assessment does as a dynamic process during which a supportive language

instructor or more capable classmate helps "learners move from what they know to what they are able do next" (Shepard, 2005, p. 66).

Sadler wrote his seminal paper on formative assessment in 1989, trying to show why students so often failed to improve even when teachers provided accurate feedback. Shepard (2005) argued that it was insufficient simply to point out right and wrong answers to students and that for assessment to be "formative", a student must:

- 1. Come to hold a concept of quality roughly similar to that of the teacher,
- 2. Be able to compare the current level of performance with the standard, and
- 3. Be able to take action to close the gap.

Sadler (1989, cited in Shepard, 2005) stated that "the teacher could help the student internalize quality criteria by translating them "from latent to manifest and back to latent again" until these criteria become "so obviously taken for granted that they need no longer be stated explicitly." Sadler wanted to develop evaluative expertise in students so they could become proficient at monitoring their own learning, which manifests scaffolding goal that this kind of classroom interaction can foster intrinsic motivation as well as cognitive and metacognitive learning (Shepard, 2005, p. 67).

According to McKenzie (1999), "Scaffolding requires continuous sorting and sifting as part of a 'puzzling' process" where the students need to combine the new information with their previous understandings to construct new ones, whereby the students are adding on, refining and elaborating. Tharp and Gallimore (1988) viewed scaffolding as the "weaving of new information into existing mental structures" and advocated scaffolding as "a practical matter of instruction" (p. 108) and argued that

"comprehending reading, writing, or listening text, involves the weaving of new and old information" (p. 109).

This weaving process was described by Wittrock (1974, cited in Tharp and Gallimore, 1988, p. 109) as "generative" and "a function of the abstract and distinctive, concrete association which the learner generates between his prior experience, as it is stored in long-term memory, and the stimuli" as if the students "are building a bridge from their preconceptions to a deeper, wiser, more astute view of whatever truth matters for the question or issue at hand" (McKenzie, 1999).

Semantic Encoding and Schema Theory

Bridging old and new information is an intertwined process that requires highlighting two crucial elements: 1) semantic encoding and 2) schema theory.

Semantic Encoding. Encoding is the process of getting information into memory for storage, and "semantic encoding is a specific type of encoding in which the meaning of something (a word, phrase, picture, event, whatever) is encoded as opposed to the sound or vision of it. Researchers argue that humans have better memory for the things which they associate meaning to and store using semantic encoding (Semantic encoding, n.d.). Encoding is seen "the crucial first step to creating a new memory, and allows the perceived item of interest to be converted into a construct that can be stored within the brain, and then recalled later from short-term or long-term memory" (The human memory, n.d.).

Demb et al. (1995) argue that 'encoding' and 'retrieval' constitute two discrete stages of memory, and define 'encoding' as "the process operating at the time of learning

that determines what information is stored in the long-term memory". According to the same source, there are different kinds of information storage that are determined based on different kinds of encoding: Words are better remembered when encoded for meaning as 'semantic' or 'deep' encoding rather than encoded for appearance as 'non-semantic' or 'shallow' encoding (Craik & Lockhart 1972, cited in Demb et al., 1995).

Graf and Schacter (1985 cited in Demb et al., 1995) define 'retrieval as the recovery of previously encoded information from the long-term memory, and argue that retrieval can be measured explicitly and implicitly: Explicitly by means of intentional recollection, and implicitly by means of priming, conditioning, or skill learning.

According to Gough et al. (2005), the Left Inferior Prefrontal Cortex (LIPC), the anterior of the frontal lobes of the brain, lying in front of the motor and premotor areas, has been implicated in planning cognitive behavior, personality expression, decision making and moderating social behavior. LIPC is considered to be orchestration of thoughts and actions in accordance with internal goals. Gough et al. stated that the most typical psychological term for functions carried out by a brain region Posterior Frontal Cortex (PFC) is executive function that relates to the following:

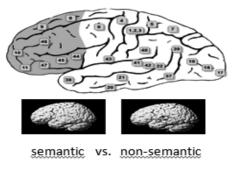
- 1. The ability to differentiate among conflicting thoughts,
- 2. Determining good and bad, better and best, and same and different activities,
- 3. Future consequences of current activities,
- 4. Working toward a defined goal,
- 5. Prediction of outcomes,
- 6. Expectation based on actions, and

7. Social control; the ability to suppress urges that, if not suppressed, could lead to socially unacceptable outcomes.

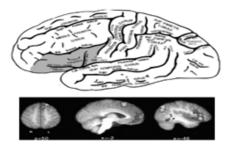
Gough et al. (2005) viewed Broca's area as the element of the language circuit that is responsible for speech production (Broca 1861 & Geschwind 1967, cited in Gough et al., 2005) and part of the LIFC region, which is commonly engaged in language paradigms. Thompson-Schill et al. (1997) viewed the role of the left inferior prefrontal cortex (LIPC) in "selection of information among competing alternatives from semantic memory."

Gough et al. (2005) used Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation (TMS) to investigate anterior and posterior left inferior frontal cortex (LIFC) when the meaning and sound of words were being processed, and concluded that TMS of the anterior LIFC selectively increased response latencies when participants focused on the meaning of stimulated presented words; synonym judgments, but not when they focused on the sound pattern of the words; homophone judgments.

Demb et al. (1995) used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to investigate the left inferior prefrontal cortex LIPC (Brodmann's areas 45, 46, and 47) involvement in semantic encoding, and concluded that words studied in a semantic (deep) encoding condition were better remembered than words studied in both easier and more difficult nonsemantic (shallow) encoding conditions (figure 2).



Left Inferior Prefrontal Cortex (LIPC)



Response vs. stimuli

Left Inferior Frontal Cortex (LIFC)

(Figure 2)

Schema

A schema (pl. schemas or schemata) is an individual's collection of prior knowledge that provides a context for meaningful interpretation of new information. Schema is defined as abstract knowledge structures that organize vast amount of information, a cognitive constructs that organize information into meaningful systems, and scripts or representations for events that provide plans for action in particular situations (Anderson, 1984; Bruning et al., 2004, cited in Wiseman, 2008; Gagne, Yekovich, & Yekovich, 1993; Schunk, 2004).

Yang (2010) defines schema as "a cognitive construct, which allows for the organization of information on the long-term memory," and defines three types of schema: *Content schema* refers to the reader's comprehension of cultural background and the whole world as a basis of culture comparison, *Formal schema* refers to the layout and rhetoric structure of a text; consisting of the literature types, writing style, language

structure, vocabulary, grammar, formal and informal literal styles, and *Linguistic schema* involves word decoding feature, as well as paragraph organizing format.

Schema Theory

When people encounter new information, they add it to their schemas, or the information stored in their long-term memories, organized into different interrelated categories, mental units, or schemas (Cooper 2006, cited in Wiseman, 2008). When people learn, they build knowledge, and are either creating new schemas, or linking together preexisting schemas in new ways, whereby, they will be able to develop expectations about the nature of the new information, attend to its most important elements, and fill in gaps where information is implied rather than stored explicitly (Wiseman, 2008).

Wiseman (2008) compared the student's long-term memory to a library of books or set of file folders. Wiseman contends that for all of this to work optimally, the students' schemas for a particular piece of information must be well-organized, easing information retrieval, and based on accurate information because if it is not, the new information will itself be poorly organized and received in inaccurate way.

Wiseman (2008) argues that when a student searches his or her long-term memory storehouse of information, unless the student's long-term memory is well-organized, the desired information may not be found, or may not be found intact. Wiseman (2008) urges teachers to teach their students the appropriate strategies of information storage for efficient and accurate retrieval, guide them in the development of accurate schemas, and teach them so that they logically build upon knowledge already gained.

Teaching in the Learners' ZPDs

Why teach in the ZPD?

Lui (2012) argues that teaching the students within their ZPDs not only benefits the students, but teachers and administrators as well. It is a collaborative teaching and learning approach that is characterized with significant tips for the sake of students, teachers and administrators in L2 acquisition as follows:

- 1. When teachers provide students with tasks, within their ZPDs, that are challenging but reasonable, this teaching approach stimulates the students thinking and motivates their efforts to learn. Meanwhile, administrators are provided with opportunities to promote higher quality to differentiate instruction in schools.
- 2. When teachers engage the students in social interaction by providing the students with meaningful interaction and feedback, the students are assisted to drive further development at an appropriate pace. This helps administrators to emphasize better teacher-student relationships.
- 3. Teachers, who have better understanding to their students as individual learners, learners in small groups setting, and leaners in larger social setting, provide their students with a learning environment where the students are valued as individuals, a collaborative group, and a class. This enables administrators to work with more motivated teachers and students.
- 4. Teachers, who are interested in discovering the unique thought processes that their students use to solve problems, provide students with a learning environment that promotes the students creativity, accept and acknowledge their thought processes.

(Lui, 2012, p. 5)

Locating student's ZPD

As Tharp and Gallimore (1988) stated, "There is no single zone for each individual" and "For any domain of skill, the leaner's ZPD can be created" (p. 31).

According to Lui (2012), locating the student's ZPD acquires a close examination of: each student as an individual learner, learners in small group, and leaners as whole group.

- 1. Locating the individual learner's ZPD: Lui (2012) provides two techniques to locate the learner's ZPD as individual learner: formal and informal individual assessment.
- a. Formal individual assessment: A teacher can conduct this assessment approach by giving instructionally valuable information about the student's independent thinking, and disregarding the purpose of obtaining a number or grade.

This assessment technique provides the teacher with more opportunities to identify the student's actual level of emerging development, the arising strengths and weaknesses, and consequently, the opportunity to work with the student in one-on-one instructional session.

b. Informal individual assessment: This assessment technique enables teachers to ensure whether or not the student has accomplished the learning objectives. To conduct this assessment technique, a teacher can use a few simple questions at the end of the lesson.

Conducting informal individual assessment provides teachers with opportunities to immediately identify and clarify any misunderstandings that may arise

during instruction and to differentiate instruction emerging based on the student's level of understanding following the initial lesson.

2. Locating learners' ZPDs in small group: Lui (2012) argue that teachers can follow this approach by presenting specific content that is most appropriate for the small group. Teachers, next, share the students in the small group in solving the learning problem and communicate ideas with them. In this way, teachers can assess their students' understanding in greater depth.

The benefits of conducting this assessment technique reside in enabling teaching and learning to focus on more individualized level and increasing the engagement of active learners in the learning process. This technique also provides teachers with more opportunities to identify and work in their students' ZPDs that emerge, as activities are tailored for each group based on students' performance.

3. Locating learners' ZPDs in whole group/class: To assess the students' ZPDs in whole group/class, teachers can introduce a topic/unit with models that meet the learning objectives expectations. The next step is that the students are assigned to work individually first, and then to share their work and thinking processes. The last step, is a collaborative work between the teacher and the students, during which, they conclude a topic/unit by sharing thoughts and reflections.

This collaborative work leads to establishing mutual objectives by teachers and students, developing and increasing listening skills, and encouraging and exploring different ways of approaching problem solving. (Lui, 2012, p. 8)

Teaching in the student's ZPD

Lui (2012, p. 6) provides six valuable guiding techniques and tips that can help L2 teachers ensure their instruction within their students' ZPDs. These techniques and tips are summarized as follows:

- 1. Teachers need to know what they want their students to understand by the end of the lesson/chapter/unit. Teacher can carry out this goal by identifying the target level of knowledge and understanding what they want their students to attain.
- 2. Teachers need to know the skills and knowledge that their students should have in order to reach their level of understanding. To accomplish this goal, educators argue that teachers can develop a model of learning progression that they expect their students to follow in order to attain the targeted knowledge and understanding (Heritage 2008, cited in Lui, 2012, p. 6).
- 3. Teachers need to ensure that the tasks and activities they created help them see what their students understand and what the students still need to work on. This goal can be accomplished when teachers create tasks, activities and problems that will help them gather information, which will indicate their students' understanding of the topic at hand while they are learning.
- 4. Teachers need to observe, assess, and listen to students to understand the thought processes used by students to reach the answers. A good strategy to attain this goal, is to conduct frequent assessments (formal or informal) that will allow patterns of emerging strengths and weaknesses, whether at the individual or group level.

- 5. Teachers need to adjust their instruction approach based on what the students have already grasped and what they still need to work on. Teachers can carry out this goal by modifying instruction, activities and groups based on what the students can do independently, with peers, and what they are still struggling with.
- 6. Teachers need to provide feedback to students using students' strengths to build on their weaknesses. A good strategy to attain this goal is to work with small groups and individual students' thinking by asking guiding questions, modeling and providing demonstrates when necessary.

Scaffolding Techniques and Strategies

Techniques. Wood et al. (1976) hypothesized what he called "scaffolding functions"; six techniques performed by the teacher, which are related concisely to the theory of instruction:

- 1. *Recruitment* refers to the teacher's enlisting the problem solver's interest in and adherence to the requirements of the task,
- 2. Reduction in degrees of freedom refers to simplifying the task by reducing the number of constituent acts required to reach solution,
- 3. *Direction maintenance* refers to keeping the students in pursuit of the particular objective of the task,
- 4. *Making critical features* refers to providing information about the discrepancy between what the student has produced and what he would recognize as a correct production,

- 5. *Frustration control* refers to "minimizing frustration during learning development" (Schwieter, 2010, p. 33), and
- 6. *Demonstration* refers to modeling or idealizing the act to be performed to reach sound solution of problem solving. (Wood et al., 1976)

Lidz (1991, cited in Schwieter, 2010) contends assisting learning via scaffolding, and provides teachers with another technique consisting of 12 steps by:

- Influencing the learner's actions through interaction, engagement of attention, and goals,
- 2. Highlighting important aspects, marking relevant differences, and elaborating detailed information,
 - 3. Drawing on the learner's past experiences and potential future ones,
 - 4. Visualizing the learner's work through his or her eyes,
 - 5. Sharing experiences that may stimulate new ideas,
 - Manipulating the task to facilitate problem solving and induce strategic thinking,
- 7. Boosting the learner's self-esteem by encouraging him or her that they have done something good,
 - 8. Challenging the learner within but not beyond his or her ZPD,
- 9. Remembering that the learning experience is the learner's not the expert's to avoid competition,
 - 10. Being familiar with the learner's behavior, and responding to it appropriately,
 - 11. Giving the learner a sense of caring and enjoyment in the task, and

12. Finding areas of improvement, and communicating them to the learner. (Schwieter, 2010, p. 34)

Strategies. Scaffolding strategies may be defined as 'instructional mechanisms' that "address the challenges learners face by structuring tasks to make them more tractable and to shape tasks for learners in ways that make their problem solving more productive" (Reiser, 2004). Educators may apply this perspective, whether intentionally or unintentionally. In the respect of applying instructional scaffolding in the L2 domain, there have been significant scaffolding strategies that have been developed to enhance L2 learners' skills in the four main modalities of L2 acquisition: reading, listening, writing, and speaking. This paper will include two models of these scaffolding strategies:

K-W-L Strategy

To enhance students' reading skill, they need to access the knowledge they already have about the topic, or make it available appropriately so that comprehension can occur (Anderson & Pichert 1978; Bransford, 1983, cited in Ogle, 1986). Ogle (1986) developed the K-W-L teaching model; a three-step procedure to help teachers become more supportive to students' knowledge and interests when reading expository material, and model for students the active thinking involved in reading for information. Ogle states that this model "can be used with nonfiction selections at any grade level and in any content, whether in reading groups or in content learning situations" (p. 564).

Ogle's model is called the K-W-L for the three basic cognitive steps: accessing what the student **K**nows, determining what the student **W**ants to learn, and recalling what the student did **L**earn as the outcome of the reading topic. Furthermore, Ogle developed a

worksheet; "K-W-L strategy sheet" (Appendix "E") to facilitate both the group process and to instill in students the concreteness of the following steps:

- **Step K- What I Know:** This step has two levels of accessing the students' prior knowledge as follows:
- (1) The teacher elicits what the students know about the reading topic. The teacher's role in this step is a facilitator, who will record what the students have volunteered about the topic on the board or an overhead projector.
- (2) At this level the students make use of the information that has been collected in the previous level, in reading. Ogle argues that this information will involve the students in thinking of more general categories of information likely to be encountered when they read.
- Step W- What I Want to learn: During this step while the students thinking, whether what the already know about the topic and the general categories of information that should be anticipated, many different questions emerge. According to Ogle (1986) this pre-reading activity develops the students own reasons for reading to find answers to the questions exploited on the topic. The teacher's role in this step is "central": the teacher will highlight the students' agreements or disagreements, fill the gaps in information, and help the students raise questions that focus their attention and energize their reading. Before reading the student writes down on the worksheet the specific questions that he or she is most interested in having answered as a result of the discussion (Ogle, 1986).

• Step L- What I Learned: After completing the reading topic, the teacher directs the students to write down on the worksheet what they learned from reading. The teacher should also have the students check their questions to determine whether the article/lesson/text dealt with their concerns, and if not, the teacher may suggest further readings to fulfill what the students seek to know. (Ogle, 1986, p. 567)

CMRBA Strategy

Abdrabo (2012) developed the Cause, Means, and Result-Based Analysis (CMRBA) strategy as a model of how L2 instructor can scaffold the students within their ZPDs while the students are in the 'other-regulation stage' to move them to the 'self-regulation stage'. CMRBA has a goal of integrating the four skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing in one task or activity. This strategy aims to relating cause to result based on means, and assisting the student analyzes the final product of the task. The CMRBA strategy consists of three steps.

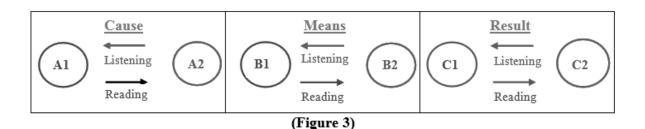
Step 1: To enhance listening and reading skills in TL.

a. During the first stage of this step the teacher will group the class to three groups; A, B, and C and each group will be divided into two subgroups; A1, A2; B1, B2 and C1, C2. The teacher will assign subgroups A1 and A2 to search the cause(s) of a specific phenomenon or problem, subgroups B1 and B2 will be assigned to search the means of solving this phenomenon or problem, while subgroups C1 and C2 will search the result(s) of solving the same phenomenon/problem.

b. Subgroups A1, B1 and C1 will search the phenomenon/problem through searching the web for reading materials on the topic, while subgroups A2, B2 and C2 will search for listening materials on the same topic.

c. The subgroups searching "Causes" of the phenomenon; A1 and A1 will record the findings of their research in the designated section in the recording worksheet (Appendix B), the subgroups searching "Means" of the phenomenon; B1 and B2 will record the findings of their research in the designated section in the recording worksheet, and the subgroups searching "Results" of the phenomenon; C1 and C2 will record the findings of their research in the designated section in the recording worksheet.

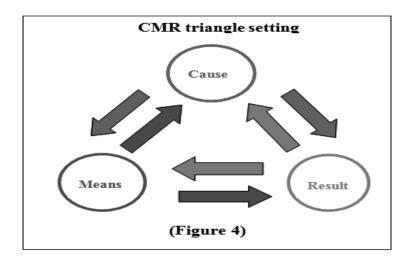
d. At the last stage of this step, group A (A1 and A2) will meet to discuss the causes of the phenomenon by exchanging the information gained from reading materials (A1) and that gained from listening materials (A2). Following the same procedure, group B (B1 and B2) will discuss the means, and group C will discuss the results (figure 3). As a mediator, the teacher's role in this step is to facilitate the listening and reading tasks, and to fill any cultural, vocabulary, grammar, or linguistic gaps that may emerge during the search for or exchanging information.



Step 2: To enhance speaking skill in TL.

- a. The teacher will combine the three main groups; Cause, Means, and Result in a
 CMR triangle shape (figure 4). The C group (A1 + A2), M group (B1 + B2) and R group (C1 + C2).
- b. Inside the CMR triangle setting the students from each group will report, in TL, their findings whereby the other 2 groups will fill in the missing 2 sections in the recording worksheet. For example, C group will receive from group M the information pertaining to means and from group R the information pertaining to results. In other words, each subgroup will have a complete picture of the causes, means, and results of the phenomenon under investigation.

The teacher's role in this step is to facilitate each group task either linguistically or in the material content in TL.



Step 3: To enhance Writing skill and Analysis in TL.

After filling in the missing sections of the recording worksheet (Appendix B), the students, individually, will write a full report in TL about the phenomenon under investigation, and then analyze it relating Results to Cause(s) based on the Means. The

report will be turned in to the teacher whose role in this step is to review the students' products in TL and to give formative feedback to the students in open discussion, where the students may take notes to avoid any similar mistake in the future assignments or tasks.

The participants in this strategy will be able to enhance the four main skills of L2; listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The subgroups may be rotated in future practices. In other words, subgroup A1 & A2 can switch with B1 & B1 in the Mean stage, and then C1 & C2 in the Result stage, whereby the students can practice all roles in CMRBA, within the same subgroup the students may switch from listening to reading, and vice versa, thus the student will have the opportunity to enhance his or her four learning modalities in L2 acquisition.

Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT)

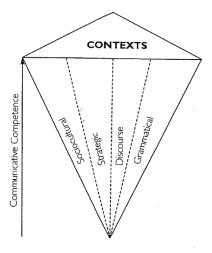
Communicative language teaching (CLT) adopts the theory that the primary function of language use is communication that "lies in the moves and strategies of the participants" (Savignon, n.d, p. 15). CLT is a set of principles determining the goals of language teaching, the mechanism that learners use to learn a language, the characteristics of the classroom activities the best facilitate language learning, the roles of both teachers and learners in the language learning setting (Richards, 2006, p. 2).

Origin and Development of CLT. The roots of CLT go back to concurrent developments in Europe and the United States. Driven by the language needs of a rapidly increasing group of immigrants and guest workers in Europe, and a rich British linguistic tradition that included social and linguistic context in description of language behavior,

the Council of Europe developed a syllabus for learners. This syllabus was based on national-functional concepts of language use (Savignon, 2002, p. 1) and "was derived from neo-Firthian systemic or functional linguistic, in which language is viewed as 'meaning potential' and the 'context of situation' (Firth 1937; Halliday 1978, cited in Savignon, 2002, p. 1).

Hymes (1971) represents the role taken by the United States in CLT development. As Savignon (2002) stated, Hymes reacted to Chomsky's characterization of the linguistic competence of the ideal native speaker: Hymes retained Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance, and proposed the term 'communicative competence' to represent "the ability to use language in a social context", and "to observe sociolinguistic norms of appropriateness" (Savignon, 2002, p. 2).

CLT-Based Classroom Model. Savignon (2002) provides a classroom model (figure 5) that shows the hypothetical integration of the four components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociocultural competence. According to Savignon (2002), this model shows how learners gradually expand their communicative competence; grammatical, discourse, strategic, and sociocultural through practice in an increasingly wide range of communicative contests and events. Savignon argues that "although the relative importance of the various components depends on the overall level of communicative competence, each [component] is essential" (Savignon, 2002, p. 8).



Components of Communicative Competence (Figure 5)

Savignon (2012) defines the four components of communicative competence as follows:

- 1. *Grammatical competence* refers to sentence-level grammatical forms, the learner's ability to recognize the lexical, morphological, syntactical and phonological features of a language, the ability to make use of those features to interpret and form words and sentences. (Savignon, 2002, p. 9)
- 2. *Discourse competence* refers to the learner's ability to produce interconnected series of utterances or written words or phrases to form a meaningful text, rather than producing isolated words of phrases. The discourse competence concerns two other concepts that arise in discussion:
- a. Text coherence as the relation of all sentences or utterances in a text to a single global proposition, and

- b. Cohesion refers to the learner's connections or structural ability to link between his or her sentences (Savignon, 2002, p. 9).
- 3. *Strategic competence* as defined by Richards (2006) refers to the learner's ability to maintain communication despite having limitations in his or her language knowledge through using different kinds of communication strategies (p. 3).
- 4. *Sociocultural competence* refers to the learner's ability to understand the social context in which language is used: the role of the learner as participant, what information the learner can share, and the function of interaction (Savignon, 2002, p. 9).

Application of CLT in L2 Acquisition. Richards (2006, pp. 14-20) provides 10 types of CLT-based classroom activities that can help teachers and curriculum developers find ways of developing classroom activities that reflect the principles of a communicative methodology. These ten types are summarized as follows:

1. Accuracy vs. Fluency Activities

Teachers can develop fluency activities by creating activities that will focus on:

- a. Reflecting natural use of language
- b. Achieving communication
- c. Requiring meaningful use of language
- d. Requiring the use of communication strategies
- e. Producing language that may not be predictable
- f. Seeking to link language use to context

To develop accuracy activities, teachers need to create activities that will focus on:

- a. Reflecting classroom use of language
- b. Focusing on the formation of correct examples of language
- c. Practicing language out of context
- d. Practicing small samples of language
- e. Avoiding meaningful communication
- f. Controlling choice of language

2. Mechanical, Meaningful, and Communicative Practice

Richards (2006) defines these three types of CLT as follows:

- a. *Mechanical practice_*refers to a controlled practice activity that students can perform without necessarily understanding the language they are using (repetition drills and substitution drills designed to practice use of particular grammatical or other items).
- b. *Meaningful practice* refers to activities where students are required to make meaningful choices during practice (describing location based on street maps, answering questions based on a list of prepositions...etc.)
- c. Communicative practice focuses on using language within a real communicative context, where the students exchange real information and use language that is not totally predictable (students draw maps of their neighborhoods and answer questions about different specific places).

3. Information-Gap Activities

This type of CLT is based on the fact that in real-life communication, people normally communicate in order to get information they do not have. To develop information-gap activities, Richards (2006) recommend teachers to place students beyond practice of language forms, and encourage students to use their linguistic and communicative resources (lists of available vocabulary, grammar notes, communication strategies, etc.) in order to obtain real and meaningful information.

4. Jigsaw Activities

This type of CLT is also based on the information-gap principle and can play significant role in integrating the three main skills in L2 acquisition: listening, reading and speaking. The main idea of jigsaw activities is dividing the class into groups and each group has part of the information needed to complete the activity. To complete the activity the students must read, in target language TL, the portions they have, listen to part of a dialog or conversation in TL and take notes so that they can decide what part fits what.

5. Task-Completion Activities

This type of CLT activities refers to activities during which the students are required to focus on their language resources to complete a task (puzzles, games, mapreading, etc.)

6. Information Gathering Activities

During this type of CLT activities, the students are required to use their language resources to complete information. Information gathering activities include surveys, interviews with native speakers, and library or web searches in TL.

7. Opinion-Sharing Activities

This type is based on the idea of involving the students in activities that focus on eliciting the student's opinion based on his or her point of view. During this activity the students compare values, opinions, or beliefs, such as ranking task in which students list specific qualities in order of importance that they might consider in choosing a date or spouse (physical appearance, financial status, position, location, emotions, support...etc.)

8. Information-Transfer Activities

This activity acquires students to take information that is presented in one form, and then present it in a different form. A good example Richards (2006) provides is assigning the students to read instructions on how to get from A to B, and then to draw a map showing the sequence.

9. Reasoning-gap Activities

Richards (2012, p. 19) states that this type involves deriving some new information from given information through the process of inference, practical reasoning, etc. A good example of applying this activity is Richards' suggestion of working out a teacher's timetable on the basis of given class timetables (p. 9).

10. Role Plays

During this activity the "students are assigned roles and improvise a scene or exchange based on given information or clues" (Richards, 2006, p. 10)

CLT and L2 Curriculum Development. Savignon (2002) provides a CLT-based curriculum development perspective: a communicative curriculum that consists of five components: 1) Language arts, 2) Language for a purpose, 3) My language is me: personal second language use, 4) You be ..., I'll be...: theater arts, and 5) Beyond the classroom. These five components can be regarded as thematic clusters of activities or experiences related to language use, which "provide a way to categorize teaching strategies that promote communicative competence" (Savignon, 2002, p. 11).

1. Language Arts

This component is also known as language analysis and focuses on forms of language, including syntax, morphology and phonology. This component concerns spelling test when writing is a goal, and highlights the importance of familiar activities (translation, dictation, and rote memorization) in bringing attention to form. Language arts component argues that vocabulary can be expanded through definition, synonyms and antonyms, and study of cognates and false cognates. Pronunciation exercises and patterned repetition of verb paradigms have important role in leading learners to focus on form, to illustrate regular syntactic, or rules of grammar (Savignon, 2002, p. 11)

2. Language for a Purpose

This component is also defined as 'language experience' that refers to using language for real and immediate communicative goals. Accordingly, Savignon (2002)

recommends teachers to pay attention, when selecting and sequencing materials, to the specific communicative needs of the learners because "every program with a goal of communicative competence should pay heed to opportunities for meaningful language use, opportunities to focus on meaning as well as form" (p. 12)

3. My Language is me: Personal second language use

This component concerns the learner's emerging identity in the new language. Savignon (2002), who sees attitude as the single most important factor in learner's success, argues that "the most successful teaching programs are those which take into account the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of language learning and seek to involve learners psychologically as well as intellectually" (p. 12).

4. Theater Arts

Inspired by the familiar words of Shakespeare, "all the world's a stage", Savignon (2002) argues that role playing and the many related activities, which constitute theater arts, are likewise a natural component of language learning. According to Savignon's view, these activities can provide the learners with the tools they need to act and allow them to experiment with the roles they play or may be called upon to play in real life. Savignon draws the role of the teacher in theater arts as a coach who provides support, strategies, and encouragement for learners as they explore new ways of being (Savignon, 2002, p. 15).

5. Language Use Beyond the Classroom

Savignon (2012) argues that despite the variety of communicative activities in the classroom, they all have one common purpose: to prepare learners to use the second

language in the world beyond the classroom. Accordingly, L2 curriculum developers are highly recommended to begin a communicative curriculum with discovery of learners' interests and needs. Curriculum developers of L2 materials are highly recommended to find opportunities to explore the learners' interests and needs through second language use beyond the classroom. Savignon recommends including "field experiences" as the course of the language course, or a workshop "where learners can compare notes, seek clarification, and expand the range of domains which they learn to function in the second language" (Savignon, 2002, p. 16).

Combining these five components; language arts, personal language use, language for purpose, theater arts, and language use beyond the classroom, is significantly an argumentative question. Although the teacher plays the axial role in this question, Savignon calls for the support of administrators, the community, and the learners themselves. Furthermore, she invites methodologists and teacher-education programs to take their roles in this responsibility by providing language teachers "with the perspectives and experiences they need if they are to respond to the realities of their world: a changing world in which the old ways of language teaching may not be the best ways" (Savignon, 200, p. 17).

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do learners see as the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ1: What do learners see as the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ3: What recommendations do learners believe would improve the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

Research Method and Design

Descriptive qualitative research provides a comprehensive summary of an event in everyday terms of the event, where researchers stay close to their participants, data, and to the surface of words and events. This design is typically an eclectic, but reasonable combination of sampling, data collection, analysis, and reporting techniques. Researchers conducting qualitative studies are selecting a method of choice when "straight descriptions of phenomenon are desired" (Sandelowski, 2000).

The researcher conducted a descriptive qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to illuminate and identify the beliefs of the participants in this study: a sample of thirty DLIFLC students of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) who are on Special Assistance in semester one of the Arabic Basic Course about the strengths and weaknesses of this program that they believed can promote or hinder their proficiency in listening, reading, speaking and writing. The researcher also elicited the participants' recommendations about changes that DLIFLC management can make to maximize the effectiveness of the Special Assistance Program for the benefit of future students who will be placed in this program.

Focus groups are seen "effective in eliciting data on the cultural norms of a group and in generating broad overviews of issues of concern to the cultural groups or subgroups represented" (Mack et al, 2005, p. 2). The researcher conducted three focus-group sessions: Session "A" was conducted at Undergraduate Middle East School I (UMA), Session "B" at Undergraduate Middle East School II (UMB) and Session "C" at Undergraduate Middle East School III (UMC).

The researcher used eight open-ended questions (Appendix D) to collect data from the participants that accomplished the purpose of this study: investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in semester one at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and providing suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

Selection of Participants

Thirty informants were recruited from the three Arabic schools located at DLIFLC: 10 participants were recruited from UMA, 10 participants from UMB and 10 participants from UMC. These thirty participants or informants were recruited voluntarily from the four U.S. military services: Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, who are studying MSA as their target language (TL) under category IV; a category under which the DLIFLC assigns students to study foreign languages in basic courses that last 64 weeks such as Arabic, Chinese, and Korean.

The researcher adopted the "quota sampling" strategy when recruiting the participants for this study. This sampling strategy argues that the characteristics of the participants "might include age, place of residence, gender, class, profession, marital status, and use of a particular contraceptive method" (Mack, 2005, p. 5).

Instrumentation

This study used eight open-ended questions (Appendix D) addressed to the participants during each focus group session as follows:

- Q1. What does your teacher do to help you develop your listening comprehension (LC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q2. What does your teacher do to help you develop your reading comprehension (RC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q3. What does your teacher do to help you develop your speaking (SP) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

- Q4. What does your teacher do to help you develop your writing (WR) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q5. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your LC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q6. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your RC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q7. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your SP skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q8. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your WR skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

The researcher used this instrument to collect data that is relevant to:

- 1. The participants' beliefs about the strengths of Special Assistance Program that they believe help them promote their proficiency in listening, reading, speaking and writing.
- 2. The participants' beliefs about the weaknesses of the Special Assistance Program that they believe hinder them in improving their proficiency in listening, reading, speaking and writing.
- 3. The participants' recommendations to DLIFLC management to maximize the effectiveness of the Special Assistance Program for future participants in the program.

Validity and Reliability (Trustworthiness)

Trustworthiness in qualitative research refers to the researcher's ability to secure four crucial components to the study under investigation: Credibility or 'internal

validity,' Transferability or 'external validity' (generalizability), Dependability or 'reliability' and Confirmability or 'objectivity' (Shenton, 2004).

- 1. **Credibility:** The researcher ensured credibility to this study by "involving the use of a wide range of informants", which is viewed as form of triangulation via data sources (Shenton, 2004). This form of triangulation was embedded in the researcher's approach of collecting data from a wide range of informants: 30 participants from three different settings; UMA, UMB and UMC. Furthermore, the data collected from 30 informants during three focus-group discussions manifested different viewpoints, attitudes and experiences: a rich picture of viewpoints, opinions, needs and behavior of the participants under scrutiny; a picture that was constructed based on the contribution of a range of people (Shenton, 2004, p. 66).
- 2. **Transferability:** Transferability or external validity refers to "the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Despite the positivist argument that study findings are impossible to apply to other situations and populations, qualitative research experts argue that "although each case may be unique, it is also an example within a broader group (Shenton, 2004; Stake, 1994, & Denscombe, 1998). As such, "the prospect of transferability should not be immediately rejected." (Shenton, 2004, p. 69). Bassey (1981, cited in Shenton, 2004, p. 69) argue that "if practitioners believe their situations to be similar to that described in the study, they may relate the findings to their own positions."
- 3. **Dependability:** Dependability or reliability means that "if the work were repeated in the same context with the same methods and with the same participants,

similar results would be obtained" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). Practitioners argue that "in practice, a demonstration of credibility goes some distance in ensuring dependability" (Lincoln & Guba, cited in Shenton, 2004). Chapter IV will provide detailed information about the findings of this study, thereby "enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to give the same results" (Shenton, 2004, p. 71)

4. **Confirmability:** Shenton (2004) defines the concept of confirmability as "the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity". In other words, the findings of the research under scrutiny should reflect the experiences and ideas of the informants "rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher" (p. 72).

During the three focus-group sessions the researcher elicited and documented the informants' views, attitudes and beliefs about the strengths and weaknesses of the Special Assistance Program as well as their recommendations about how the effectiveness of this program can be maximized to benefit future participants in this program. The informants' responses were documented, analyzed, and reported to reflect the informants' 'ideas and experiences rather than the researcher's predispositions. As such, the reader of this study report will be able to determine how far the data and constructs emerging from this study can be accepted (Shenton, 2004, p. 72).

Methodological Limitations

The methodological limitations of this descriptive qualitative study reside in the following:

1. The analysis of the data derived from this qualitative research relate to a small sample (30 participants), which can be seen as a weakness that may lessen the possibility

of generalizability in other L2 learning settings (Bryman, 1988, cited in Carr, 1994, p.717).

2. The close relationship between the researcher as a DLIFLC faculty member teaching Arabic and the subjects; DLIFLC students learning MSA in this descriptive qualitative study complicated the research process and extended the responsibilities of the researcher. Sandelowski (1986, cited in Carr, 1994, p, 718) argues that this close relationship may lead to researchers having difficulty in separating their own experiences from those of their subjects: the researcher investigated the strengths and weaknesses of the SA program during Semester One of the Arabic Basic Course and elicited the participants' recommendations of developments that can be made on this program in the future. On the other hand, the participants in this study might have devaluated the academic value of this study since it was conducted by a faculty member who affiliates to the DLIFLC management. As such, the participants might have provided exaggerated responses during the data collection processes which may affect the findings of this study whether positively or negatively.

Data Collection Procedures

During each of the three focus-group sessions, the investigator took the lead and responsibility for directing the three sessions as a moderator. Each focus-group session lasted 50 minutes (2:55-3:45 pm). The researcher, as a moderator, created a thoughtful and permissive atmosphere before starting the focus-group session. Each session included welcome, overview of the goal of this study: Investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the SA Program and eliciting the participants' recommendations of how DLIFLC

management can improve the effectiveness of this program in the future as the major topic of the discussion. Finally, the researcher stated the ground rules for the discussion (Krueger, 2002).

Protection of Human Subjects

Research experts state that ethical issues may arise in any kind of research due to the tension created between the aims of research to make generalizations for the good of others, and the rights of participants to maintain privacy during the research process (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Before the researcher conducted the data-collection process, he obtained the participants' informed consent, which included the purpose of this study "within the broader context of the research study" (Mack et al, 2005, p. 31). To maintain protection and confidentiality for the participants in this study, the researcher conducted an informed-consent session (2:00-2:50 p.m.) in which he presented PowerPoint to potential participants a detailed summary of the purpose of the study under investigation, methodology and data-collection instrument, length and procedures, the role of the participants in the data-collection method, as well as the participant's rights to withdraw from the study at any time. The researcher also highlighted the following:

- a. The nature of the informants' involvement in the study.
- b. The purpose and time of the data-collection instrument.
- c. The participants will be given a code name made up of letters and numbers that will be used for record-keeping and reporting purposes. For instance:
- 1) The code P7/1 will refer to participant # 7 in Focus Group "A" that will be conducted at Middle East School I (UMA).

- 2) The code P6/2 will refer to participant # 6 in Focus Group "B" that will be conducted at Middle East School II (UMB).
- 3) The code P2/3 will refer to participant # 2 in Focus Group "C" that will be conducted at Middle East School III (UMC).
- d. The information provided for this research will be treated confidentially, and all written data will be kept securely.
- e. The results of the research will be reported as summary data only, and no individually identifiable information will be presented.
- f. In the event the participant's information is quoted in the written results, the researcher will use codes to maintain the participant's confidentiality.
 - i. The researcher ensured the participants' full understanding of the following:
- 1) All participants are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this study at any time.
- 2) Each participant agrees to consent (appendix C) before continuing with the interview.
 - 3) There is no penalty for opting out prior to or during the interview.
 - 4) Confidentiality and anonymity will be protected throughout the research.
- 5) A hot line crisis intervention phone number is provided at the bottom of the consent form.
- 6) A follow up phone call/e-mail will be made by the researcher, on the day following the focus-group session, to check on the wellbeing of the study participant who may have or may not have experienced distress due to their participation in the research.

7. The researcher assured to the participants that the final stage of treatment for data will be destroyed completely by fire.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis refers to collecting open-ended data extracted from the general questions that are addressed to the study participants (Creswell, 2009). To conduct data analysis, the researcher carried out the following steps:

- 1. Coding: The researcher analyzed the data collected from the participants for themes or perspectives, and reports three themes:
- a. The strengths of the Special Assistance Program in Semester One that can help the participants improve their proficiency in language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing),
- b. The weaknesses of Special Assistance Program in Semester One that can hinder the participants in promoting their proficiency in language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing), and
- c. The participants' suggestions about the developments needed to maximize the effectiveness of the Special Assistance Program in the future.

Then the researcher generated categories of information (open coding), selected one of the categories and positioned it within a theoretical model (axial coding), and then explicated a story from the interconnection of these categories (selective coding) (Creswell, 2009, p. 184).

- 2. Classifying and Categorizing: After coding, the researcher moved to the categorizing process, which implied three types of categories: organizational, substantive, and theoretical (Maxwell, 2008).
- a. Organizational Categories: These categories are generally broad subjects or issues established by the researcher, and referred to what the researcher has anticipated previously such as "students who have been in the program for a month (or more) are assumed to be in a position to comment on its strengths and weaknesses and to recommend improvements in it."
- b. Substantive Categories: These are primarily descriptive and include a description of the participant's concepts and beliefs ("emic" concepts), that is, stay close to the data categorized rather than a more abstract theory.
- c. Theoretical Categories: The researcher placed the coded data into an abstract framework: These categories might be derived either from prior theory (Sociocultural Theory, for instance) or from an inductively developed theory, and most likely represented the researcher's concepts ("etic" categories), rather than the participants' own concepts ("emic") (Maxwell, 2008).
- 3. Labeling Primary Patterns: During this step, the researcher gave names to the patterns discerned among the coded segments, and at this point the data analysis movef from the initial identification phase of descriptive codes to a more advanced interpretive analysis of the relationships found between coded categories.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do learners see as the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ1: What do learners see as the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ3: What recommendations do learners believe would improve the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

This chapter presents the findings of the study from the participants' focus group sessions that were conducted with 10 participants from UMA on 7 August, 10 participants from UMB on 8 August and 10 participants from UMC on 1 August 2013.

Summary of the Study Methodology

As stated earlier, the primary methodology selected represents the Phenomenological inquiry, primarily focused on "Linguistical Phenomenology" that takes a perspective that language and discourse reveal the relations between "understanding, culture, historicality, identity, and human life" (Blanchot, 1968). That

concept was applied to three administratively (3) and pedagogically different educational linguistic programs, yet structurally academically similar, which literally includes the following schools geographically located on the Defense Language Institute (DLI) site.

- 1. The Undergraduate Middle East School I (UMA),
- 2. The Undergraduate Middle East School II (UMB), and
- 3. The Undergraduate Middle East School III (UMC).

Each school offered 10 student participants. Each participated in a focus group, and responded to 8 non, and semi-structured questions through writing, to gather the maximum amount of data that comprehensively clarified the full academic, linguistic, and cultural experiences. Since each school implements a unique academic educational platform, it is necessary for the participants to speak to the texturization (writing) of the "lived experience." Lastly, the researcher moved to incur the following analytical strategies:

- 1. Following the related etymological sources (language, word, meaning growth)
- Following and connecting idiomatic phrases (using and comparing natural language expressions)
- 3. Obtaining experiential descriptions from participants
- 4. Observing and reflecting on the phenomenal literature, and
- 5. Continuous writing and rewriting.

Each group articulated their experience and experiences, and also refined their responses through the shared combined viewpoints within the reflective context.

Although the combined participants measure 30 in total, each represented their respective

unique educational program. By using a linguistic phenomenological approach, the data provided a full understanding based on the writings, researcher's memoing, reflections on the literature, and other writing and rewriting analysis.

Participant Demographics

Thirty participants, currently placed in Special Assistance Program, provided data to this study by participating in three focus-group sessions: Session "A" at Middle East School I "UMA" (10 participants), Session "B" at Middle East School II UMB (10 participants) and Session "C" at Middle East School III UMC (10 participants).

Since the researcher was not assigned as MSA instructor in any of the named Arabic schools, none of the 30 participants had direct connection with the researcher, and accordingly there was no conflict of interest between the researcher and the participants.

The participants in this study were recruited on a volunteer basis among DLIFLC students who were placed in the Special Assistance (SA) Program because of their poor academic performance in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), specifically, a GPA of below 3.0 out of 4.0 or a test score below C in any skill: listening, reading, speaking and/or writing.

Instrumentation

A researcher-developed instrument was used in this study; 8 semi-structured questions (Appendix D):

Q1. What does your teacher do to help you develop your listening comprehension (LC) during the Special Assistance sessions?

- Q2. What does your teacher do to help you develop your reading comprehension (RC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q3. What does your teacher do to help you develop your speaking (SP) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q4. What does your teacher do to help you develop your writing (WR) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q5. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your LC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q6. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your RC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q7. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your SP skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q8. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your WR skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

This instrument was used to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, as well as to elicit the participants' recommendations about the improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

Presentation of Data

The participants' responses were transcribed and analyzed using NVivo version 10. The coding format followed a method of independent analysis and grouped according to emerging four themes/categories:

- 1. Listening (LC),
- 2. Reading (RC),
- 3. Speaking (SP), and
- 4. Writing (WR).

Each of these themes generated three nodes: (a) Strengths, (b) Weaknesses, and (c) Recommendations. Under each of these three nodes a number of child-nodes were generated pertaining to the participants' perceptions towards each question.

RQ1: What do learners see as the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

The participants responded to these semi-structured questions mentioned in the instrument:

- Q1. What does your teacher do to help you develop your listening comprehension (LC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q2. What does your teacher do to help you develop your reading comprehension (RC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q3. What does your teacher do to help you develop your speaking (SP) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

Q4. What does your teacher do to help you develop your writing (WR) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

Responding to these four semi-structured questions satisfied the response to RQ1: the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One. Based on the participants' beliefs, these strengths influenced the following four major skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing as follows:

1. Listening (LC)

The participants demonstrated their beliefs in their response to the first question in the instrument: What does your teacher do to help you develop your listening comprehension (LC) during the Special Assistance sessions? Results below this table show quotes of 23 participants related to LC strengths.

	LC Strengths During SA Sessions					
	23 informants reported 6 varied perceptions in 6 child-nodes					
No;	Perceptions	Number of	%			
		informants				
1	Listening strategies	13	56.5%			
	a. Pre-listening strategies	6	46.15%			
	b. While-listening strategies	2	15.4%			
	c. Post-listening strategies	5	38.5%			
2	Reviewing previous listenings and	12	52.2%			
	assignments					
3	Using authentic material	10	43.5%			
4	Combining listening with other skills	2	8.7%			
5	Repetition	2	8.7%			
6	Additional listening material (GLOSS &	1	4.3%			
	EXCEL)					

Listening strategies

a. Pre-listening strategies:

P1/1: the teacher allows us to listen to the passage through a few times before having us explain what we heard. This allows us to not only attempt making logical guesses based off at our current knowledge, but it also allows us to analyze what we really do know during class time.

P2/1: When listening to a passage, they play it one time. Then after the first listening, they ask what information we got.

P10/1: First they allow me to listen to the passage twice then ask for EEIs.

P5/2: go over helpful vocabulary prior to listening passages.

P1/3: The teacher also writes down key vocabulary on the board.

P7/3: we've been going back further to previous chapters in an effort to build up a better base of vocab and listening skills before moving on to the most recent chapter.

b. While listening strategies

P10/1: they ask me for more specific details and allow me to listen again.

P5/2: provide multiple choice answers along with the listening passages.

c. Post-listening strategies

P1/1: what helps is having the teacher go through the listening passage at the end of the discussion, and having the teacher explain it in segments. This allows for an in-depth look at the passage: and gives the teacher a chance to fill in the gaps at understanding that may stem from things like unknown vocab and grammar.

P10/1: If I cannot understand, they provide me the translation and give examples of when and where I had heard this vocabulary from before.

P2/1: They play it a second time. After extracting more information, they break down the passage to ensure we understand a maximum percentage of the listening.

P1/2: After the two listening we would review what we wrote down and confirm if we were able to comprehend the basic idea of the passage. Then the teacher would read the passage back to us and have us translate it. If we were not able to translate so words, the teacher would give us the translation so we can learn those missing words. Once the teacher read the passage and translated it, we would then again listen to the passage to confirm we understood the passage fully.

P5/3: We are asked to completely transcribe supplementary listening passage. After 20-30 min, we are given a typed transcription of the passage to check work against. Effectiveness: Excellent.

Reviewing previous listenings and assignments

P1/2: our teacher will occasionally have us review listening from the text book that was covered previously in the day.

P4/2: We review homework (listening) that we found particularly difficult.

P4/2: We review class material (listening) that we completed during the day.

P7/2: my teacher(s) have me/us do TTT to improve my listening. It is mostly (almost completely) independently done (and corrected) ourselves. Sometimes we will do supplementary materials from prior chapters to see how we are doing,

P1/3: my teacher normally plays listening passages from previous chapters/units and has us revisit earlier passages.

P2/3: teachers review our listening skills by reviewing the listening passages we have covered during normal class hours.

P3/3: my teacher usually tells me to listen to some passages and answer the questions. Sometimes it is old supplementary materials in order to reinforce the older vocabulary I have heard.

P6/3: By reviewing listening material we heard earlier that day to further cement it in our brains.

P7/3: Our teacher reviews our supplementary listening packet.

P8/3: Reviewing listening passages from the same day as the same chapters.

P10/3: We review the old listening passages to reinforce vocabulary and to train the ear to recognize the words.

P10/3: my teacher usually reviews old listening passages. With the same/old material, I am able to remember the answers to the same questions and the summaries to the passages.

Using authentic material

P3/1: One teacher will play authentic pieces with video, so it's more fun to try and figure at what's going on.

P4/1: There were 1 or 2 teachers that use authentic material and that is very helpful.

P6/1: The help that is offered for LC is usually authentic material which is allocated to periods before SA hours.

P2/2: Our teachers provide us with authentic listening materials.

P8/2: authentic material, which consists of news clips from Middle Eastern sources such as Al-Jazeera.

P1/3: Sometimes the teachers play authentic material like news items and help us write key words and phrases.

P3/3: sometimes it is new authentic listening passages to expose myself to newer and more and more difficult vocabulary.

P5/3: Authentic materials such as BBC or Al-Jazeera.

P8/3: on occasion we've reviewed authentic materials.

P10/3: The authentic material supplements the topics we have already covered and allows us to hear native speakers at their usual pace without exaggerating/stressing the syllables.

Combining listening with other skills

P6/2: teachers usually apply the TTT so that we hear the words being spoken and also practice writing them down.

P9/3: Some teachers combine listening with speaking, reading and transcription.

Normally we listen to the passage once, the teacher asks us what we understood and we try to answer in Arabic. We listen again. Third time, we usually segment the passage into sentences and phrases. Sometimes transcribe them, sometimes given the script. The more I listen, the more comfortable I become with the listening and I understand and distinguish more content. As I am a visual learner, it helps me to eventually see the text or to try and write it.

Repetition

P7/1: If lucky, depending on which teacher, will repeat what was said sentence by sentence/idea-by-idea.

P9/1: my instructor helps develop my listening comprehension by playing audio files out load and repeating them.

Additional listening material

P4/2: We use study aides like GLOSS and EXCEL to boost our listening skills beyond the class book.

2. Reading (RC)

In their response to the second question in the instrument: What does your teacher do to help you develop your reading comprehension (RC) during the Special Assistance sessions? Results below this table show quotes of 19 participants related to RC strengths.

RC Strengths During SA Sessions 19 informants reported 6 varied perceptions in 6 child-nodes					
No.	Perceptions	Number of informants	%		
1	Reviewing previous readings and assignments	9	47.4%		
2	Reading strategies	6	31.6%		
	a. Pre-reading strategies	4	66.7%		
	b. While-reading strategies	2	33.3%		
3	Using authentic material	6	31.6%		
4	Vocab retention and expansion	3	15.8%		
5	Going over roots	2	10.5%		
6	Translation from Arabic to English	1	5.3%		

Reviewing previous readings and assignments

P3/1: One teacher will go over the past nights MSA homework to make sure we really understand it.

- P1/2: The teacher would have us review passages that were covered in the day's lesson.
- P4/2: We do, however, review homework reading passages if I found them particularly difficult.
 - P6/2: We are asked to re-read passages that have been previously gone over
- P2/3: my teacher will help with reading skills by going back a few chapters and reviewing those reading passages covered in normal class hours.
 - P5/3: Review passages from textbooks. Effectiveness: fair.
- P7/3: we have been going over passages in the textbook from earlier that day or previous chapters.
- P8/3: what I have done has exclusively been reviews of passages that were real in the same day.
- P10/3: For reading comprehension we use a variety of sources. We have reviewed our textbooks, used old textbooks, and supplementary passages printed out by my teachers.

Reading strategies

- a. Pre-reading strategies
- P1/1: It is most helpful to be allowed to attempt deriving a meaning from a passage before having it translated.
- P1/1: what helps the most is when the teacher shows how to eliminate filler word that add no meaning to the passage, thus allowing a student to better hone their skills at

speed reading and putting the passage in context before delving into the specifies of what is being read.

P10/1: They advise us to not "get stuck" on one word we do not know and try to comprehend the entire passage with the context rather than word by word.

P2/3: we will briefly, review related vocab before reading.

b. While reading.

P2/1: When given a paragraph, our teachers have us take turns with reading it first. Then, we go back to the beginning and break it down into sections se we can learn new vocabulary within the context of the paragraph.

P3/2: breakdown the passages ensuring that we go over the words.

Using authentic material

P9/1: authentic material helps me become accustomed to recognizing letters, numbers, and unfamiliar words or phrases

P2/2: Our teachers let us look up media articles and new reports in MSA and they help us go through them. They also help us with any personal authentic material like books.

P6/2: students have been encouraged to read news and attempt to determine the meaning.

P8/2: read authentic news articles, usually pertaining to the words we have been learning.

P5/3: Review authentic materials from BBC. Effectiveness: Excellent.

P9/3: My teachers usually display authentic reading materials from the internet, sometimes supplementing the lesson plan and other things from the news. I enjoy it as it is often more challenging and helps me expand my vocabulary in context.

Vocab retention and expansion

P8/1: we, as a class, review the vocab it helps with reading comprehension.

P5/3: Spelling is given of unknown vocab, and can be recorded on flash cards for later review. This is my preferred technique for vocab expansion.

P7/3: Sometimes we will also review our vocab list.

Going over roots

P10/1: They help me discover roots and other words I know that are from the same root or have the same form.

P10/3: In the beginning we we would conjugate verbs and look at other forms of the three letter roots to help grasp how the language is manipulated.

Translation from Arabic to English

P7/2: My teacher(s) have me/us translate TTT from Arabic to English to improve our reading comprehension skills.

3. Speaking

Sixteen students shared their perceptions as a response to the third question in the instrument: What does your teacher do to help you develop your speaking (SP) skill during the Special Assistance sessions? Results below this table show quotes of 16 participants related to SP strengths.

	SP Strengths During SA Sessions				
16 informants reported 6 varied perceptions in 6 child-nodes					
No.	Perceptions	Number of	%		
		informants			
1	Interaction with teacher and peers	6	37.5%		
2	One-on-one speaking with teachers	4	25%		
3	Speaking in target language	4	25%		
4	Speaking strategies	2	12.5%		
5	Appropriate time for feedback	1	6.25%		
6	Repetition	1	6.25%		

Interaction with teacher and peers

P2/1: They often give us topics and have us converse with a classmates. Then, they walk from group to group to over-listen to everyone; making necessary corrections.

P3/1: A few teachers will come up with scenarios to talk about, which can be fun since there is only a few of us in our SA classes. The teachers are able to heat us more clearly, and we'll also talk just two at a time so no one is trying to talk over the others.

P7/1: We are given a random topic special to that day's or the reviews day's lesson. We are asked questions and/or told to speak to the teacher and/or other students.

P9/1: We (the students) choose which topics to talk about using vocabulary we are already familiar with. If I come across a word or phrase that I have not yet encountered, I ask my instructors how to write and pronounce it; then I write the word down in my notebook so I remember it for future conversations.

P2/3: The teacher will usually listen to the class as the students pair up and talk to each other.

P4/3: we are given a general speaking topic. Usually it is role-playing: For example at the bank or in the travel agency. Then we are given a partner and just free to speak as we please and when they hear a mistake they fix it.

One-on-one speaking with teachers

P1/1: The most help comes from having simple conversations with the teacher that develop into realistic situations.

P8/1: when I have a native-speaker correcting my mistakes, it helps to understand what exactly I did wrong. Speaking with teachers also helps developing listening on a first-pass skill level.

P4/2: Sometimes we have short Arabic conversations (especially on Fridays when nobody wants to be at 7th hour).

P5/3: 1. Practice FORTE and prearranged topics from texts.

Speaking in target language

P4/1: They try to use English as a last resort.

P2/2: our teachers try to speak as much MSA as possible to encourage us to utilize the language as well.

P3/2: the teacher speaks with us, or asks us questions that call for Arabic answers.

P8/3: Our teacher in particular has encouraged speaking in Arabic during the SA hour.

Speaking strategies

P9/3: We usually start by reviewing important vocabulary and phrases relevant to the topic and writing them on the board. This helps in case we are struggling to build on the scenario. It's very helpful to see all the terms organized together.

P10/3: going over the "diacritics" and the "syllabifying" of the language was the primary focus for helping and developing my speaking skill.

Appropriate time for feedback

P2/1: Our teachers encourage us to speak without holding back so that they can correct our mistakes.

Repetition

P9/3: Repetition is the best way for me to improve my pronunciation. Some words definitely feel more natural to me as I use them almost every day in speaking.

4. Writing

Twenty-one students shared their perceptions as a response to the fourth question in the instrument: What does your teacher do to help you develop your writing (WR) skill during the Special Assistance sessions? Results below this table show quotes of 21 participants related to WR strengths.

WR Strengths During SA Sessions					
21 informants reported 6 varied perceptions in 6 child-nodes					
No.	Perceptions	Number of	%		
		informants			
1	Writing practice	14	66.7%		
2	Translation English/Arabic, Arabic/English and	5	23.8%		
	Transcription (TTT)				
3	Repetition	2	9.5%		

Writing practice

P1/1: The main thing SA helped with was providing time for extra writing practice to allow a student to fine tune writing complications and confusions that may developed during the quick pace and the course.

P2/1: our teacher will give us vocabulary words to write. This improves our ability to spell.

P7/1: We are sometimes asked to write the FLO activities on the board. From there the teacher corrects misspellings, incorrect punctuation

P9/1: she dictates a word, phrase, or sentence, and all the students transcribe what we heard. Afterwards, she individually corrects each of us.

P1/2: Occasionally we would transcribe sentences or spell vocabulary words.

P3/2: TTT exercises and have us write on the board.

P5/2: Some teachers have us transcribe sentences using vocabulary words, which is extremely helpful.

P8/2: Sometimes a teacher will read vocabulary words or simple sentences aloud and we write down what she says, usually on a whiteboard so she can critique our spelling and comprehension.

P2/3: My teacher has asked me in the past to listen to him tell a short phrase/story and asked us to create a story of our own and write about it. He will then review our work and make any necessary changes.

P5/3: Transcription of spoken vocab.

P6/3: Transcription with teacher was fantastic the few times I chose to stay and go to him for extra practice.

P7/3: Our writing practice mostly comes from the transcription passages we do once or twice a week. Sometimes we will also write vocab words from the most recent chapter on the board and have them checked.

P8/3: Some teachers will rarely allow us the opportunity to practice vocabulary on our own, and given this opportunity, some students will write vocab words on the board.

P9/3: We usually write sentences using the new vocabulary and thus the teachers correct them. I enjoy writing these the most. Sometimes we listen to passages and transcribe them.

Translation English/Arabic, Arabic/English and Transcription (TTT)

P4/1: They have us translate sentences from English to Arabic and then correct it, as needed.

P2/2: Sometimes we will listen to the listening passages. Then, we transcribe and translate them.

P4/2: We use transcription mainly for the benefit that is has for listening comprehension, but transcription also benefits my writing skills.

P6/2: TTT is mainly used for this skill. At times a teacher will read a passage and the students will transcribe what is being said.

P7/2: the teacher(s) have the class do TTT to practice writing words/sentences.

Repetition

P3/1: Some teachers will have us transcribe passages from the day, and then we compare our work to what we had already written earlier. That helps some since it's repetitive and helps train our ears.

P10/1: Verbally repeat to us the word or phrase we are stuck on: either by speaking more clearly than the audio file or by exaggerating the letters in the word.

RQ2: What do learners see as the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

The participants responded to these semi-structured questions mentioned in the instrument:

- Q5. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your LC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q6. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your RC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q7. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your SP skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q8. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your WR skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

The researcher summarized from the participants' responses to these four semistructured questions the response to RQ2: the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One. Based on the participants' beliefs, these weaknesses influenced the four major skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing. The table shows quotes of eight participants related to LC weaknesses.

1. Listening

	LC Weaknesses During SA Sessions		
	8 informants reported 6 varied perception	ns in 6 child-nodes	
No;	Perceptions	Number of	%
		informants	
1	Inappropriate level of listening materials	3	37.5%
2	Group listening	1	12.5%
3	Unenthusiastic teachers	1	12.5%
4	Lack of listening strategies	1	12.5%
5	Limited creativity	1	12.5%
6	Repetitive supplementary material	1	12.5%

Inappropriate level of listening materials

P2/2: Sometimes the teachers can accidently throw material at us that is too difficult and/or frustrating for us.

P5/2: My teachers provide a lot of extra authentic listening material. However, typically this material is way beyond our levels so it does not really help but rather stresses us out a bit.

P8/2: Sometimes the authentic material is too high above our level.

Group listening

P1/1: When listening to a passage as a group and discussing it as a group, it becomes difficult to gauge exactly what each student could hear and what they just copied from someone else after hearing what they said.

Unenthusiastic teachers

P6/3: I'd also like to note that the majority of the teachers lack enthusiasm. It's near impossible to have active students, excited to learn without active teachers excited to teach. I feel like a lot of the classes are just going through the motions.

Lack of listening strategies

P1/3: The teachers don't give very many tips on how to improve listening. The teachers normally tell us to write key words when we listen and take notes of anything you hear during the passage. The problem with this method is that I miss things because my focus turns to writing rather than listening

Limited creativity

P9/2: The instructor is limited in helping any one individual address their weaknesses; at best some form of listening passage is arbitrarily distributed without a specific goal in kind as dictated by the department chair. It is difficult for the instructor to deviate from the guidelines set out by the department chair to assist the students.

Repetitive supplementary material

P3/3: in supplementary materials, I'm not learning as much because it is just repeating the same supplementary materials I've heard before.

2. Reading

Results below this table show quotes of three participants related to RC weaknesses.

	RC Weaknesses During SA Sessions 3 informants reported 3 varied perceptions in 3 child-nodes		
No;	Perceptions	Number of	%
		informants	
1	Selecting inappropriate level of reading material	1	33.3%
2	Interrupting learners while reading	1	33.3%
3	Depriving teachers of creativity	1	33.3%

Selecting inappropriate level of reading material

P4/3: Sometimes we are given reading packets of authentic material but it is usually not at our level. It's either way above or way below our reading level. If we could nail down materials with our current vocab and levels of reading, I think it would be very helpful.

Interrupting learners while reading

P2/1: sometimes as we're reading our teachers cut us off and finish the sentence for us. I find this frustrating because I don't learn effectively when this happens.

Depriving teachers of creativity

P9/2: Nothing outside the guidance handed out by the department chair tailored to assist any student.

3. Speaking

Results below this table show quotes of eight participants related to SP weaknesses.

	SP Weaknesses During SA Sessions		
	8 informants reported 5 varied perception	ns in 5 child-nodes	
No;	Perceptions	Number of	%
		informants	
1	Lack of speaking practice	5	62.5%
2	Lack of using target language	2	25%
3	Lack of one-on-one speaking with teachers	2	25%
4	Correction during speaking	1	12.5%
5	Lack of speaking to both genders	1	12.5%

Lack of speaking practice

- P6/2: Speaking is rarely worked on. We rarely ever practice speaking during SA
- P7/2: Nothing actually made to help me on a speaking task, just the normal greetings, pleasantries, and instructions about the schedule for the hour.
 - P8/2: We do not practice speaking in these sessions.
 - P2/3: Speaking is generally the least reviewed topic during the SA hour.
 - P7/3: We will rarely have free-form speaking practice.

Lack of using target language

- P6/2: As with every other hour we are encouraged to use the target language, however, it's rarely used during SA.
 - P7/2: Most of the hour is spent in silence or in English.

Lack of one-on-one speaking with teachers

- P2/1: I feel as if only speaking to my peers it hinders my ability to grow in my SP skill. When/if I have a question, my peer cannot always help me.
- P4/1: Speaking with other students who are also weak in this area doesn't improve either of us.

Correction during speaking

P1/1: The main issue I have is being corrected during a speaking session because it interrupts the flow of thought, taking attention away from the direction and bringing it to the faults of the speaking, creating insecurity and decreasing confidence.

Lack of speaking to both genders

P2/1: I'm in a section with all males. I am a female and get no practice speaking to females.

4. Writing

Results below this table show quotes of 3 participants related to WR weaknesses.

	WR Weaknesses During SA Sessions		
	3 informants reported 2 varied perceptions in 2 child-nodes		
No.	Perceptions	Number of	%
		informants	
1	Lack of writing practice	2	66.7%
2	Lack of personal-experience writings	1	33.3%

Lack of personal-experience writings

P7/2: they've never had us do a writing passage of our own making during SA, but our whole class must journal in Arabic every night for homework (if that counts).

Lack of writing practice

P4/3: We definitely need more writing assignments. Maybe they can speak the sentences in English and have us write in Arabic as we could both produce the language better learn how to structure sentences and have practice conjugating.

P8/3: I have received no help in developing my writing skill during the SA sessions.

RQ3: What recommendations do learners believe would improve the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

The participants responded to these semi-structured questions mentioned in the instrument:

- Q5. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your LC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q6. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your RC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q7. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your SP skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q8. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your WR skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

The researcher extrapolated from the participants' responses these four semi-structured questions the response to RQ3: The participants' recommendations that might help improving the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One, when conveyed to DLIFLC management. Based on the participants' beliefs, these recommendations encompassed the four major skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing.

1. Listening

The table below shows quotes of 22 participants' recommendations about LC.

	LC Recommendations for Future SA Sessions			
	22 informants reported 10 varied perceptions in 10 child-nodes			
No.	Perceptions	Number of	%	
		informants		
1	Authentic material	8	36.4%	
2	Listening strategies	7	31.8%	
3	Vocabulary retention	4	18.2%	
4	Listening and reading simultaneously	3	13.6%	
5	Determining learner's listening level	3	13.6%	
6	Reviewing previous listenings	3	13.6%	
7	Listening individually	2	9.1%	
8	Listening to variable topics	2	9.1%	
9	Listening analysis	1	4.5%	
10	Selecting challenging topics	1	4.5%	

Authentic material:

P3/1: having more authentic listening without the pressures of being graded.

P2/3: more authentic material would help because we would not already know the answer. BBC Arabic is a great option.

P3/3: I would prefer to listen to authentic passages or lower-level news, rather than supplementary materials.

P4/1: Use new and/or authentic material.

P4/3: receiving the most recent material as much as possible would be nice.

P5/3: Have vocab. Lists of unknown words from an authentic passage. Review the list, and have the student listen for these words. Build upon this base from day to day.

P7/3: I think finding different or more authentic listening passages would be beneficial. This would cause us to hear our vocab from several different sources and not be able to fill out the exercises by memory.

P9/2: listen to authentic material: news, TV shows, culture etc., and give either oral or written summary in Arabic and in English.

Listening strategies

P1/3: A better strategy is the recall the protocol where you listen to the entire passage, and try to summarize in your head what you heard when the passage ends, and the second time through try to get the details or at least the main idea, and then at the end of the second listening write down your answer. This strategy works better because it causes you to listen to and summarize the conversation as whole rather than random bits of information.

P7/1: Make sure that all teachers slow the individual sentences/ideas if not initially understood.

P8/1: If there was a way to work on more listening strategies during this period, I think it would help improve my listening overall.

P9/1: by slowly repeating the information.

P10/1: Focus on vocabulary retention, reviewing words and listening to new passages, and saying vocab words out loud and not reading them.

P5/2: I think spending more time learning how to pronounce the words would help us be able to recognize words in a listening passage.

P9/3: I definitely prefer being able to see the text after listening. I could compose what I hear and what I read. I understand a lot more when I see it.

Vocabulary retention

P7/2: More vocab repetition orally for pronunciation recognition (this would also help speaking).

P1/3: Having glossary/vocabulary lists from IPod and having students quickly write the words that they hear is good practice for quickly producing and recognizing vocabulary.

P2/3: Reviewing vocab by ONLY letting us hear it is a good option.

P7/3: Going through the vocab list on one day would be beneficial. We would have the teacher play the recorded vocab and have to transcribe while giving meaning. This would encompass a lot of our skills in one go.

Listening and reading simultaneously

P2/1: I would prefer sometimes to be able to read things as I listen to them.

Maybe it would help open my ears to recognize more sounds that often times get slurred when listening to passages.

P5/2: I can typically recognize vocabulary words while reading (I'm a visual learner). I think spending more time learning how to pronounce the words would help us be able to recognize words in a listening passage.

P9/3: I especially want to see the text of more authentic listening material. It helps me to distinguish what sounds to become more comfortable in the language.

Determining learner's listening level

- P2/2: I think if they just took more consideration of our skill levels when planning, it could be more beneficial.
- P5/2: We need material that is either on our level or just below our level-NOT above. We need better opportunities to work our way up to the level that we need to be on.
- P8/2: We should focus on listening to simple passages that stick to the words we are learning or already know.

Reviewing previous listenings

- P9/1: Reviewing listening exercises that we had covered during the day or in the previous night's assignments would be beneficial.
- P7/2: We could look at older/less difficult passages more frequently to keep up on the older vocab and build confidence in our listening skills.
- P8/3: Reviewing very old listening passages to refresh basic vocabulary that I never had a firm grasp on.

Listening individually

- P1/1: The best thing could be done is allow students to listen to separate listening passages on their own and explain what they heard. This allowing for a student and teacher to be able to gauge listening abilities of students without impeding on the other students, as well as allowing the teacher to be able to see exactly what each student may or may not be hearing.
- P6/3: I think it is crucial for the teaching staff to equally involve each student during the lesson. It would be better if teachers asked each an equal number of questions

rather than address the whole class because some students seem to dominate class time and it doesn't create a fair, healthy learning environment.

Listening to variable topics

P2/3: Having more variable topics of review would help us to remember a large array of words.

P4/3: I would like to have some new/different listening passages to use while reviewing.

Listening analysis

P7/2: I feel like if we really broke down, and dissected the passages, it would help me a lot.

Selecting challenging topics

P10/1: find listening passages on topics the student is struggling with.

2. Reading

Results below this table show quotes of 20 participants' recommendations about RC.

	RC Recommendations for Future SA Sessions 20 informants reported 11 varied perceptions in11 child-nodes		
No.	Perceptions	Number of informants	%
1	Diverse reading activities, topics and strategies	6	30%
2	Authentic material	5	25%
3	Vocabulary retention	4	20%
4	Going over verb measures/roots	3	15%
5	Selecting appropriate level of material	3	15%
6	Reading individually	2	10%

7	No correction (feedback) while reading	1	5%
8	Daily reading assignments	1	5%
9	Grammar structure	1	5%
10	Mini-quizzes	1	5%
11	Challenging topics	1	5%

Diverse reading activities, topics, and strategies

P3/1: By continuing to go over the words from our MSA lessons, and by talking to us and explaining words in MSA.

P7/1: Allow time in class for a RAPID ROTE learning style if not able to use the program itself. I find that my "individual study" is much more effective.

P7/2: have us do something fun with it, like a game or some such so that the studying is interesting, not putting us to sleep after a long day. We could do something small and fun at first and then build it up in difficulty.

P2/3: Reading a wider range of topics as well can help us maintain knowledge of words in variable topics.

P7/3: we should be focusing more on gisting as opposed to word for word translation. This would help us focus on developing our speed-reading abilities for tests without bagging as down/potentially frustrating us with a multitude at new vocab at once.

P8/3: I would prefer to review old reading passages and practice finding very specific information with those.

Authentic material

P4/2: Reading through authentic news articles via BBC Arabic, Al Jazeera, or Euronews Arabic, are all great places to find articles that allow us to learn words that have a high frequency of use within their proper contexts.

P5/2: provide extra authentic reading material, typically out of our level as well.

P7/2: the teachers could actually give us more reading passages.

P9/2: Reading authentic material geared towards the current unit vocab, much like for what can be done to aid LC. Read books; short stories, culturally relevant material along with writing and summarizing orally.

P4/3: we could go over some more authentic readings because that is what's on the test.

Vocabulary retention

P10/1: Focus on vocab retention.

P3/2: Spend even more time helping us to remember the vocab before the quizzes.

P5/3: Review vocab endlessly.

P7/3: spending more time on the vocab would create a better base. Possibly giving mini-quizzes of the vocab from post chapters would help keep everything fresh.

Going over verb measures/roots

P8/1: I would like to spend more time going over roots. I have found that if you can break words down during reading and understand content

P5/3: Discuss roots and perform root identification exercises.

P10/3: Going over the measure chart more would improve my reading, or going over the common forms of the root. The measure chart has helped in learning a few of the patterns used within the language.

Selecting appropriate level of material

P10/1: Provide level appropriate material.

P2/2: The teacher can provide more materials at the perfect level for us.

P4/3: If we could nail down materials with our current vocab and levels of reading, I think it would be very helpful.

Reading individually

P1/1: Allowing students to read different but similar passages focusing on the same skills, allow for the students and teachers to really see what the student is missing out on the reading without allowing the student to piggy-back on the answers of the other students and hiding their faults out of embarrassment.

P4/3: I also prefer reading individually and trying to figure it out on my own as opposed to just being given the answer right away.

No correction (feedback) while reading

P2/1: If I'm going to learn effectively, I need to be able to attempt an exercise with appropriate corrections following my attempt at reading a passage

Daily reading assignments

P9/1: A daily reading assignment (either optimal or mandatory) would increase my reading fluency and my ability to take information from a given passage.

Grammar structure

P10/1: Focus on grammar structure.

Mini-quizzes

P7/3: Possibly giving mini-quizzes of the vocab from post chapters would help keep everything fresh.

Challenging topics

P1/2: Provide new topics that are beyond the text book that will help learn/teach new vocabulary.

3. Speaking

Results below this table show quotes of 22 participants' recommendations about SP.

	SP Recommendations for Future SA Sessions				
	22 informants reported 11 varied perceptions in 11 child-nodes				
No.	Perceptions	Number of	%		
		informants			
1	Speaking activities and strategies	9	40.9%		
2	One-on-one speaking with teachers	8	36.5%		
3	No correction (feedback) while speaking	3	13.6%		
4	More speaking practice	3	13.6%		
5	Mock-speaking test	2	9.1%		
6	Vocabulary retention	2	9.1%		
7	Diverse speaking topics	1	4.5%		
8	Giving presentations	1	4.5%		
9	Question & Answer sessions	1	4.5%		
10	Integrating speaking with other language skills	1	4.5%		
11	Teachers should be patient	1	4.5%		

Speaking activities and strategies

P10/1: Saying and hearing words, then using them in a single sentence.

P1/2: Provide clear direction on how to speak. They would generate sentences for us to follow as a guideline to help us have clear and concise conversations.

P3/2: Add more interesting elements to the topics.

P5/2: I think that providing us with some sort of outline for scenarios/conversations would help, at least for me. That way initially I know what I am expected to say, how it should sound, and I can build on it further.

P7/2: Doing out loud reading and repetition would help a lot too.

P5/3: Encourage a conversation using the same vocab, but a slightly difficult content. Americans are motivated by entertainment; conversations become more involved and animated when involving enjoyable subjects with specialized knowledge.

P7/3: Possibly having one SA a week devoted to free-form conversation would help us build confidence in our abilities and knowledge.

P8/3: I would like to see a combination of repeating sentences after the teacher, narrating stories to the SA class, pairing up to practice dialogues for scenarios, and interpretation with the teacher acting as the English speaker.

P9/3: We should definitely encourage more people to transition into immersion. The teachers should remind them more when they answer in English, especially with words we've already leaned.

One-on-one speaking with teachers

P2/1: I would enjoy more of a one on one speaking with the teachers.

- P4/1: We need more one-on-one speaking with the teacher.
- P7/1: In the target language, one on one or even 2 on 1 (student to teacher ratio) works phenomenally well for speaking.
- P5/2: I prefer speaking with a teacher first so I don't sound dumb in front of everyone.
- P2/3: I believe the teacher should tour around the class and have one on one with each student for 10 minutes and talk with him about any topic covered in the course up to that point in time.
- P4/3: One-on-one speaking would be much better. That way they could pick out more of our mistakes and we could listen to them speak and hear their pronunciations a lot better.
- P6/3: I think we should speak more Arabic during class. The practice you get with a native speaker doesn't compare with whatever practice you do with another MSA student out of class.
- P9/3: I enjoy speaking with the teachers. They correct our mistakes what making people nervous.

No correction (feedback) while speaking

- P1/1: The thing that helps the most is being able to speak through a conversation first then receiving corrections at the end of the session.
- P10/1: When they wait till the end, I am paying more attention to the mistakes and how to fix them.

P2/3: Do not correct the student every mistake they make, **but allow them to flow and** correct them on basic, repeated errors they make.

More speaking practice

P2/2: Hold more speaking intense in SA sessions.

P8/3: I would greatly prefer the SA be shifted towards speaking practice in our effort to improve in all areas of the language.

P10/3: Spending more time speaking in the language helps to surpass the difficulties of producing the unfamiliar sounds.

Mock-speaking test

P8/1: I think that if I had some type of mock speaking test during SA, it would help not only with speech, but with the testing environment also.

P10/1: Mock speaking tests would be great since half of the trouble I face when speaking is my nerves.

Vocabulary retention

P10/1: Vocab retention is key.

P7/3: Vocab day would help build a base for these conversations.

Diverse speaking topics

P3/1: Coming with scenarios for us to talk about. The more diverse at topics, the more words we learn by speaking them, and the better prepared we are for speaking tests.

Giving presentations

P4/2: We should give presentations on topics related to the material weekly during 7th hour.

Question & Answer sessions

P4/2: Have "question & answer" sessions, which will help us both in listening and speaking.

Integrating speaking with other language skills

P9/2: Speaking can be worked concurrently with reading or listening with a focus towards usage of diction and fluency tailored for relevant subject matter.

Teachers should be patient

P6/3: Teachers should be more patient with our speaking. This language is new and foreign to us so naturally we will be slow and fumble over our words when we talk.

However, some teachers will cut me off mid-sentence and finish my thought for me in Arabic rather than let me get the practice in.

4. Writing

Results below this table show quotes of 20 participants' recommendations about WR.

	WR Recommendations for Future SA Sessions 20 informants reported 6 varied perceptions in 6 child-nodes		
No.	Perceptions	Number of informants	%
1	Writing activities and strategies	10	50%
2	More writing practice	5	25%
3	Sharing students in selecting written assignments	4	20%
4	More grammar	1	5%
5	Teachers should be patient	1	5%
6	Verbal correction (Feedback)	1	5%

Writing activities and strategies

P2/1: I would enjoy our teachers making us keep a journal of weekly activities or thoughts. I would be beneficial because we'd be to look back and see how much progress we've made throughout the course.

P4/1: I think maybe a combination of having us write our own sentences, translating from English to Arabic, and having us write 3-4 sentences that are very similar to one another and have us pick the one that is the most correct and explain why.

P7/1: AKA "step method" used in Rapid Rote while in class, we would practice writing the words kind of a quiz type activity via "step 3" in Rapid Rote. Step 3 gives the English meaning and we're made to think of the Arabic translation. Not only recalling meaning, but writing out the recalled answer would help guarantee spelling/writing success.

P9/1: A good idea would be to have students write short sentences using the vocabulary they've covered from the current chapter. This not only helps with writing the letters and numerals in Arabic characters, but also would reinforce the way certain phrases are used in the language in general.

P6/2: I would to see more writing drills in general. Besides TTT, I rarely like when a teacher reads a passage and we transcribe; it seems to help. In general, more time allotted to writing during class.

P7/2: We can do more free writing (like journaling) that you absolutely CANNOT use a laptop with!

P9/2: Writing short stories or summaries of material covered in LC or RC, split sections and tailoring homework to meet needs of student

P4/3: They can speak the sentences in English and have us write in Arabic as we could both produce the language better learn how to structure sentences and have practice conjugating.

P7/3: We could write stories or sentences using our current vocab to help it stick.

P8/3: I believe that copying sentences in the target language directly from the textbook could be valuable, combined with directed writing assignments of various lengths.

More writing practice

P8/1: We could do more original writing. Composing more of our own thoughts and creating original ideas.

P2/2: Provide us with more transcription exercises.

P5/2: Continue practicing with us how to write and spell.

P6/3: I like transcription lessons with some teachers. The only improvement I can think of is possible adding a few more new vocab words.

P7/3: More transcription.

Sharing students in selecting written assignments

P8/1: Composing more of our own thoughts and creating original ideas. Maybe writing stories or poems: something to bring our young Arabic minds into a more abstract thought-process.

P2/3: I wish we would have a free writing topic as our homework for at least once per week.

P5/3: Encourage reading about enjoyable topics, the mandate either a summary or an opinion in Arabic. The student will be forced to stretch his understanding to encompass the demand of the subject.

P9/3: Encourage people to write more about topics they are interested in. that is the only way they will be prolific instead of the normal parsimonious responses.

More grammar

P10/3: To help my writing skill, I would like to know more Arabic grammar.

Knowing the grammar not only improves my writing ability but has helped me in reading and speaking.

Teachers should be patient

P10/1: Not get frustrated with the student when they don't immediately recognize the words. Making sure that the student has help available when needed but also understands to not just give them the answer, but to push them in the right direction.

Verbal correction (Feedback)

P3/2: Spend more time verbally going over the mistakes in writing.

Summary of Findings

The following tables summarize the findings of this study. How the participants reported their perspectives, thoughts and perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, as well as their potential

recommendations about the improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

Each table demonstrates three linguistic aspects: strengths, weaknesses and suggestions, in three different sections, pertaining to a specific language skill: listening, reading, speaking or writing. In the very right column of each table, a percentage represents the perceptions/thoughts of specific views as reported by the informants, which were collected from the same child-node.

Strengths, Weaknes	Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations of Listening Comprehension (LC) of		
S	Special Assistance Program in Semester One		
	Strengths		
	1. Listening Strategies	56.5%	
	2. Reviewing previous materials	52.2%	
	3. Using authentic material	43.5%	
	4. Combining listening and other skills	8.7%	
	5. Repetition	8.7%	
	6. Additional listening materials	4.3%	
Listening	Weaknesses		
Comprehension	Inappropriate level of listening material	37.5%	
	2. Group listening	12.5%	
LC	3. Unenthusiastic teachers	12.5%	
	4. Lack of listening strategies	12.5%	
	5. Limited creativity	12.5%	
	6. Repetitive supplementary material	12.5%	
	Recommendations		
	1. Authentic material	36.4%	
	2. Listening strategies	31.8%	
	3. Vocabulary retention	18.2%	
	4. Listening and reading simultaneously	13.6%	
	5. Determining learner's listening level	13.6%	
	6. Reviewing previous listenings	13.6%	
	7. Listening individually	9.1%	
	8. Listening to variable topics	9.1%	
	9. Listening analysis	4.5%	

10. Selecting challenging topics	4.5%
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Strengths, Weaknes	sses and Recommendations of Reading Comprehension	n (RC) of
\$	Special Assistance Program in Semester One	
	Strengths	
	Reviewing previous readings and assignments	47.4%
	2. Reading strategies	31.6%
	3. Using authentic material	31.6%
	4. Vocab retention and expansion	15.8%
	5. Going over roots	10.5%
	6. Translation from Arabic to English	5.3%
	Weaknesses	
	1. Selecting inappropriate level of reading material	33.3%
Reading	2. Interrupting learners while reading	33.3%
J	3. Depriving teachers of creativity	33.3%
Comprehension		
	Recommendations	
RC		T = -
	1. Diverse reading activities, topics and strategies	30%
	2. Authentic material	25%
	3. Vocabulary retention	20%
	4. Going over verb measures/roots	15%
	5. Selecting appropriate level of material	15%
	6. Reading individually	10%
	7. No correction (feedback) while reading	5%
	8. Daily reading assignments	5%
	9. Grammar structure	5%
	10. Mini-quizzes	5%
	11. Challenging topics	5%

Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations of Speaking Skill (SP) of Special Assistance Program in Semester One				
	1. Interaction with teacher and peers	37.5%		
	2. One-on-one speaking with teachers	25%		
	3. Speaking in target language	25%		
	4. Speaking strategies	12.59		
Speaking Skill	5. Appropriate time for feedback	6.259		
	6. Repetition	6.259		
SP	Weaknesses			
	1. Lack of speaking practice	62.59		
	2. Lack of using target language	25%		
	3. Lack of one-on-one speaking with teachers	25%		
	4. Correction during speaking	12.59		
	5. Lack of speaking to both genders	12.59		
	Recommendations	·		
	1. Speaking activities and strategies	40.99		
	2. One-on-one speaking with teachers	30.59		
	3. No correction (feedback) while speaking	13.69		
	4. More speaking practice	13.69		
	5. Mock-speaking test	9.1%		
	6. Vocabulary retention	9.1%		
	7. Diverse speaking topics	4.5%		
	8. Giving presentations	4.5%		
	9. Question & Answer sessions	4.5%		
	10. Integrating speaking with other language skills	4.5%		
	11. Teachers should be patient	4.5%		

Strengths, Weaknesses and Recommendations of Writing Skill (WR) of Special Assistance Program in Semester One				
	1. Writing practice	66.7%		
	2. TTT	23.8%		
Writing Skill	3. Repetition	9.5%		
	Weaknesses			
WR				
	1. Lack of writing practice	66.7%		
	2. Lack of personal-experience writing	33.3%		
	Recommendations			
	1. Writing activities and strategies	50%		
	2. More writing practice	25%		
	3. Sharing students in selecting written assignments	20%		
	4. More grammar	5%		
	5. Teachers should be patient	5%		
	6. Verbal correction (feedback)	5%		

The data included in the above four tables provided a clear image of the strengths, weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One, as well as recommendations as seen and reported by the study participants. Based on this data, the researcher will provide his recommendations whether for DLIFLC management, the profession, or future research in chapter five.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Overview

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What do learners see as the strengths of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ1: What do learners see as the weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

RQ3: What recommendations do learners believe would improve the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One?

Summary of the Study

DLI students who score below level "C" in any tested skill or those who have a GPA below 3.0 out of 4.0, are placed in the Special Assistance Program (SAP). SAP is conducted at DLIFLC during the 7th teaching hour (2:55-3:45 p.m.). The goal of this program is to assist students who make less than satisfactory progress in acquiring foreign language skills, whether graded (listening, reading and speaking) or not-graded (writing). During SAP sessions the participants receive targeted instructional assistance, which the researcher referred to in this study as scaffolding: A "process that enables a

child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts" that essentially consists of "the adult 'controlling' those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner's capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence" (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90).

Scaffolding, provided by DLI instructors during SAP sessions, should be offered to students within their zone of proximal development (ZPD): "The distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978).

Students who have been in the Special Assistance Program SAP) for a month or more (20-22 sessions or more), were assumed to be in a position to comment on its strengths and weaknesses, and to recommend improvements in it. Investigating the beliefs of SAP participants can provide the DLIFLC management with information that can potentially be used to improve the Special Assistance Program in the future.

Two theories correlated to this study: Sociocultural Theory of Mind (SCT) theorized by the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky in the 1930s and Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT). Sociocultural theory of mind (SCT) developed by Vygotsky (1896-1934) argued that learner's complex forms of thinking have their origins in the learner's social interactions [through mediation] rather than in the learner's private explorations. A learner acquires new cognitive skills when receiving guidance from teachers or more capable peers (Sams, n.d.). This external, targeted language assistance,

which Vygotsky referred to in his zone of proximal development (ZPD) was introduced and termed as "scaffolding" by Wood, Bruner, and Ross (Wood et al., 1976, p. 90).

Lantolf and Thorne (2006B) argued that learners traverse three stages of selfdirection or regulation in their cognitive-development process:

Object-Regulation Stage: This is the first stage of the learner's cognitivedevelopment process where the learner is often controlled by, or uses, objects in the learning setting like pictures, visual aids or body language.

Other-Regulation Stage: During this second stage the learner is supported implicitly or explicitly by mediations that involve different levels of external instructional assistance, direction, or what is technically known in the L2 domain as scaffolding, and

Self-Regulation Stage: When the learner reaches this last stage of his or her cognitive development, the learner becomes able to accomplish the learning activities with minimal, or no external support (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006B, pp. 199-200).

Based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Long's Interaction

Hypothesis Theory, second language learning can happen through in-class interaction and
oral communication (Moussa, 2010, p. 1). Long's theory argues that the interactional
collaboration among peers can lead to second language (L2) acquisition and that when L2
learners communicate through interaction, they are most likely to achieve better levels of
comprehension of the new input (Ellis 1999, 1998, 1995; Ellis 1997, cited in Moussa,
2010, p. 1; Long 2006).

Communicative Language Teaching Theory (CLT) "was conceived from a sociolinguistic approach to language learning that stresses on emphasis on activities that

engage the student in language use that is more meaningful and authentic" (Kavanagh, 2012), p. 730). The primary goal of CLT is for learners to develop communicative competence and to make use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. Based on the CLT perspective, communicative competence is defined as the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behavior that requires the learners' active involvement in producing the target language. According to Principles of Communicative Language Teaching and Task-Based Instruction (2007), communicative competence encompasses four sub-competences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (pp. 5-6). Richards (2006) defines these sub-competences as follows:

- 1. Linguistic competence: the learner's knowledge of how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions,
- 2. Sociolinguistic competence: the learner's knowledge of how to vary the use of language according to the setting and the participants. In other words when formal and informal language are used appropriately, as well as when the language is used appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication,
- 3. Discourse competence: the learner's knowledge of how to produce and differentiate the types of texts: narratives, reports, interviews and conversations, and
- 4. Strategic competence: the leaner's ability to use different kinds of communication strategies to maintain communication despite having limitations in his/her language knowledge. (p. 3)

The researcher conducted a descriptive qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to illuminate and identify the beliefs of the participants in this study: a sample of thirty DLIFLC students of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) who are on Special Assistance in semester one of the Arabic Basic Course about the strengths and weaknesses of this program that they believed can promote or hinder their proficiency in listening, reading, speaking and writing. The researcher also elicited the participants' recommendations about changes that DLIFLC management can make to maximize the effectiveness of the Special Assistance Program for the benefit of future students who will be placed in this program. By applying this methodology, the researcher stayed close to his participants, data, and to the surface of words and events (Sandelowski, 2000).

Thirty informants were recruited from the three Arabic schools located at DLIFLC: 10 participants were recruited from UMA, 10 participants from UMB and 10 participants from UMC. These thirty participants or informants were recruited voluntarily from the four U.S. military services: Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps, who are studying MSA as their target language (TL) under category IV; a category under which the DLIFLC assigns students to study foreign languages in basic courses that last 64 weeks such as Arabic, Chinese, and Korean.

The researcher conducted three focus-group sessions: Session "A" was conducted at Undergraduate Middle East School I (UMA) on August 7th, Session "B" at Undergraduate Middle East School II (UMB) on August 8th and Session "C" at Undergraduate Middle East School III (UMC) on August 1st 2013.

The researcher used eight open-ended questions (Appendix D) to collect data from the participants that accomplished the purpose of this study: investigating the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in semester one at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and providing suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future. Each group articulated their experience and experiences, and also refined their responses through the shared combined viewpoints within the reflective context. Although the combined participants measure 30 in total, each represented their respective unique educational program.

Conclusion

Assumption 1

Participants in the current Special Assistance Program believe in the strengths of this program and think it can help them overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges that caused them to be placed in this program.

Twenty-three (23) participants believed in the strengths of SAP and reported the following strengths aspects for LC:

- 1. Listening strategies.
 - a. Pre-listening strategies.
 - b. While-listening strategies.
 - c. Post-listening strategies.
- 2. Reviewing previous listenings and assignments.
- 3. Using authentic material.

- 4. Combining listening with other skills.
- 5. Repetition.
- 6. Additional listening material (GLOSS & EXCEL).

Nineteen (19) participants believed in the strengths of SAP and reported the following strengths aspects for RC:

- 1. Reviewing previous readings and assignments.
- 2. Reading strategies.
 - a. Pre-reading strategies.
 - b. While-reading strategies.
- 3. Using authentic material.
- 4. Vocab retention and expansion.
- 5. Going over roots.
- 6. Translation from Arabic to English.

Sixteen (16) participants believed in the strengths of SAP and reported the

following strengths aspects for SP:

- 1. Interaction with teacher and peers.
- 2. One-on-one speaking with teachers.
- 3. Speaking in target language.
- 4. Speaking strategies.
- 5. Appropriate time for feedback.
- 6. Repetition.

Twenty-one (21) participants believed in the strengths of SAP and reported the following strengths aspects for WR:

- 1. Writing practice.
- 2. Translation English/Arabic, Arabic/English and Transcription (TTT).
- 3. Repetition.

Assumption 2

Participants in the current Special Assistance Program see some deficiencies in this program and believe these deficiencies can hinder them in overcoming the listening, reading, speaking, and writing challenges that have caused them to be placed in this program.

Participants in the current Special Assistance Program saw some deficiencies in this program and believed these deficiencies can hinder them in overcoming the listening, reading, speaking, and writing challenges that have caused them to be placed in this program.

Eight (8) participants saw some deficiencies of SAP and reported the following weaknesses aspects for LC:

- 1. Inappropriate level of listening materials.
- 2. Group listening.
- 3. Unenthusiastic teachers.
- 4. Lack of listening strategies.
- 5. Limited creativity.
- 6. Repetitive supplementary material.

Three (3) participants saw some deficiencies of SAP and reported the following weaknesses aspects for RC:

- 1. Selecting inappropriate level of reading material.
- 2. Interrupting learners while reading.
- 3. Depriving teachers of creativity.

Eight (8) participants saw some deficiencies of SAP and reported the following weaknesses aspects for SP:

- 1. Lack of speaking practice.
- 2. Lack of using target language.
- 3. Lack of one-on-one speaking with teachers.
- 4. Correction during speaking.
- 5. Lack of speaking to both genders.

Three (3) participants saw some deficiencies of SAP and reported the following weaknesses aspects for WR:

- 1. Lack of writing practice.
- 2. Lack of personal-experience writings.

Assumption 3

Participants in the current Special Assistance Program have some recommendations which they believe, if conveyed to DLIFLC management, can be used in developing this program to help future SA participants overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges that may cause them be placed in this program.

Participants in the current Special Assistance Program have some recommendation, which upon their beliefs, can be used in developing this program to help future SA participants overcome the listening, reading, speaking and writing challenges that may cause them be placed in this program.

Twenty-two (22) participants recommended the following LC aspects for future SAP:

- 1. Authentic material.
- 2. Listening strategies.
- 3. Vocabulary retention.
- 4. Listening and reading simultaneously.
- 5. Determining learner's listening level.
- 6. Reviewing previous listenings.
- 7. Listening individually.
- 8. Listening to variable topics.
- 9. Listening analysis.
- 10. Selecting challenging topics.

Twenty (20) participants recommended consideration of the following RC aspects

for future SAP:

- 1. Diverse reading activities, topics, and strategies.
- 2. Authentic material.
- 3. Vocabulary retention.
- 4. Going over verb measures/roots.

- 5. Selecting appropriate level of material.
- 6. Reading individually.
- 7. No correction (feedback) while reading.
- 8. Daily reading assignments.
- 9. Grammar structure.
- 10. Mini-quizzes.
- 11. Challenging topics.

Twenty-two (22) participants recommended for consideration the following SP aspects for future SAP:

- 1. Speaking activities and strategies.
- 2. One-on-one speaking with teachers.
- 3. No correction (feedback) while speaking.
- 4. More speaking practice.
- 5. Mock-speaking test.
- 6. Vocabulary retention.
- 7. Diverse speaking topics.
- 8. Giving presentations.
- 9. Question and Answer sessions.
- 10. Integrating speaking with other language skills.
- 11. Teachers should be patient.

Twenty (20) participants recommended the following WR aspects for future SAP:

1. Writing activities and strategies.

- 2. More writing practice.
- 3. Sharing students in selecting written assignments.
- 4. More grammar.
- 5. Teachers should be patient.
- 6. Verbal correction (Feedback).

Recommendations

Recommendations for DLIFLC Instructors

As expert L2 instructors, DLIFLC instructors are encouraged to concern the following recommendations while teaching listening, reading, speaking, and writing:

Listening. Although authentic material is inevitable source in LC sessions, selecting the appropriate level of this material to the learners' learning level is very crucial factor that will affect learner's involving, participation, problem-solving capability, as well as competency. Since not all students do not have the same pace during listening, and due to the varied learning styles of these students, it is highly recommended that group listening will not please all students participating in the same listening session/activity. Using IPods is a good strategy that can help students listen individually, have control over pausing, or repeating listening passages when they need. Listening individually can also avoid students any distraction, whether inside or outside the classroom.

DLIFLC instructors are also encouraged to use a wide array of L2 listening strategies that will conform to each phase of the listening process: pre-listening, while listening, and post-listening. Assessing students' listening levels, whether individually,

among small groups, or for the whole class is very important to determine the appropriate listening strategies that can be applied to each student, small groups, or the whole class.

Vocabulary retention is highly recommended to be included in pre-listening activities. Because the teachers' intervention during this phase is virtually impossible due to the ephemeral nature of listening (Vandergrift, 2002, p.5), it is beneficial for learners to be guided - before the actual listening begins- to conduct some concrete actions during listening such as: note taking, completion of a picture or schematic diagram or table, composing questions or any tangible actions to demonstrate ongoing monitoring of meaning (Rost, 2002. p.20). Post-listening strategies allow students to build mental representations, develop short-term memory, and increase motivation for listening a second time. This phase might also include other tasks such as: reading, writing, speaking, comparing notes, negotiating a summary with a partner, and formulating responses, or questions about what was heard (Rost, 2002. p.20).

Reading. Like listening, selecting the appropriate level of authentic reading material to the students' reading level, is a vital factor in assisting students during the reading process. Competent L2 instructors are more patient with students, do not cut their students off while they are reading, and finish the sentence/paragraph for them. This action causes frustration to their students, who feel they do not learn effectively when this happens. Assessing students' real stand in reading comprehension can help instructors create the right strategy/activity that will help each individual student be a self-regulated learner.

Due to the uniqueness of the Arabic language, going over the roots/verb measures is very crucial in assisting MSA students. This help students break words down during reading and understand the topic under reading. Providing MSA students with measure chart can help them in learning a few of the patterns used within the language. Reading individually does not allow only students, but teachers as well, and helps both see what the student is missing out on the reading. Providing students with effective feedback (after reading), daily reading assignments, grammar structure, mini-quizzes, and challenging topics, are also recommended to consider during reading sessions.

Speaking. Professional DLIFLC instructors will apply L2 speaking strategies/techniques during speaking sessions. Among these techniques: saying words to students and asking them to use these words in single sentences, generating sentences for students to follow as a guideline will help them have clear and concise conversations, providing students with outlines for anticipated scenarios/conversations will also help students know what they are expected to say, how it would sound, and accordingly they can build on them in the future. Also having one SA a week devoted to free-form conversations would help students build confidence in their speaking-abilities and knowledge.

As native speakers of Arabic, instructors are highly recommended to run one-onone speaking sessions (teacher to student). During this sessions teachers would be able to
pick out more of students' mistakes, and students would have the opportunity of listening
to teachers speak and hear their sound pronunciation a lot better. Some more tips for
instructors to consider during speaking sessions are: conducting vocabulary retention

activities, selecting diverse speaking topics, assigning students to speaking presentations, and running question and answer sessions.

Writing. Professional instructors in DLIFLC context apply some successful techniques during writing sessions. Among these techniques is to assign students write weekly journals about their activities during that week, have students write short sentences using the vocabulary they have covered during the day, and to have students write sentences/paragraphs/short stories using the current vocab to help it stick to students' memories.

Recommendations for the Profession

The focus of this study was exploring how foreign language instructors can assist students improve their listening, reading, speaking, and writing skills in L2 acquisition.

Assisting students in developing any of the mentioned skills requires instructors to have good understanding of two crucial elements:

- 1. The student's real stand in the target skill/language, and
- 2. How assistance can be given to students within their potential competency.

The findings of this study showed some gap between students' needs and teaching approach. Foreign language instructors are invited to assess their students' real stand in the target skill/language, and to follow the appropriate technique when providing assistance to their students.

Understanding the learner's real stand in the target skill/language requires not only locating the individual learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD), but locating learners' ZPDs in small group, and locating learners' ZPDs in whole group/class.

When providing assistance to their students, (Lui, 2012) argues that instructors are encouraged to know the following:

- 1. What they want their students to understand by the end of the lesson/chapter/unit.
- 2. What skills/knowledge their students need to know to reach the expected level of understating, and
- 3. Whether the task/activity helped the students understand, and what the students still need to work on.

Recommendations for Future Research

The purpose of this study was to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center, and to provide suggestions to DLIFLC management about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

The findings of this study demonstrated that the current SA program conducted during semester one has significant strengths. These strengths monitored teachers' efforts and successful teaching approaches applied during SA sessions in the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In the other hand, few weaknesses have emerged from the participants' feedback. Most importantly, the participants offered tens of suggestions, which can be considered to maximize the effectiveness of SA program in the future.

Accordingly, more descriptive qualitative studies, using phenomenological approach, are highly recommended to be conducted in the three Arabic schools located at DLIFLC: UMA, UMB, and UMC with participants from semester II and semester III, who are placed in SA sessions of these semesters. By illuminating and identifying the beliefs of these participants, locating the strengths and weaknesses of SA program during semesters II and III will be revealed before DLIFLC management. Most importantly, tens of suggestions are expected to be received from the participants in these suggested studies, which can play a significant role in assisting, not only DLIFLC Arabic students, but students learning other foreign languages in DLIFLC foreign language schools.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A K-W-L strategy sheet (Ogle, 1986)

1. K- What we know	W- What we want to find	L- What we learned and still		
	out	need to learn		
2. Categories of information we expect to use				
A.	E.			
B.	F.			
C.	G.			
D.				

Appendix B Recording Worksheet (CMRBA Strategy)

Cause Group (A1 & A2)	Means Group (B1 & B2)	Result Group (C1 & C2)
The Cause(s) of the phenomenon is/are: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.		
	The phenomenon can be solved by Means of: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.	
		Solving this phenomenon will lead to these R esults: 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.

Appendix C CONSENT FORM

Dear Prospective Participant:

My name is Nasr D. Abdrabo and I am a doctoral student in the education department at Argosy University-San Francisco Bay Area –Alameda, CA working on my dissertation. I am conducting my study: "Learners' Beliefs about the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center" This study is a requirement for my degree and will be used only for providing the DLIFLC management with your beliefs on the strengths and weaknesses of the current Special Assistance Program as well as your recommendations about improvements that can be made by DLIFLC management to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

You are cordially invited to volunteer to participate in my dissertation research. The purpose of this study is to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of the current Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester 1, and to elicit your suggestions about improvements that can be made to maximize the effectiveness of this program in the future.

What will be involved if you participate?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you participate in this research, you will be asked to participate in one focus-group session during the seventh hour (2:55-3:45 pm).

How long will this study take?

The research will be conducted between 4/15/2013 and 6/30/2013 (Monday – Friday). You will be asked to participate during this timeframe.

What if you change your mind about participating?

You may withdraw from my study at any time before or during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as they are identifiable. Your decision about to discontinue

participating will not jeopardize your future relations with the DLIFLC. You may withdraw from this study without fear of penalty or negative consequences of any kind.

How will your information be treated?

The information you provide for this research will be treated confidentially, and all data (written and audio-recorded) will be kept securely. Written documentations will be stored in a locked file cabinet, accessible only by me, in my home. Audio-recorded data and transcribed data will be stored on my personal password protected laptop, which accessible only by me, then transferred to the locked cabinet when the research is completed.

Results of this study will be reported as summary data only; no individually identifiable information will be presented. In the event your information is quoted in the written results, I will use codes to maintain your confidentiality.

All information obtained will be held with the strictest confidentiality. You will be asked to refrain from placing your name or any other identifying information on any research form or protocols to further ensure confidentiality is maintained at all times. All recorded information will be stored securely for three years, as per the requirements of Argosy University- San Francisco Bay Area –Alameda, CA. At the end of the three years, all recorded data and other information will be deleted and all written data will be shredded.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

There will be no direct or immediate personal benefits for you from your participation in this study, except for the satisfaction of knowing you have contributed to research. The potential benefits of this research will be additional to knowledge on:

- 1. Understanding and evaluating the value of the instructional assistance that you receive from your instructor(s) during Special Assistance Program sessions.
- 2. Understanding and evaluating the effectiveness of the Special Assistance Program from the perspective of participant students, as well as highlighting sound teaching strategies that can help improve students' proficiency levels in listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking and writing.

3. Providing DLIFLC with your beliefs and recommendations that may help DLIFLC management formulate new plans, techniques and strategies to maximize the effectiveness of the SA program in the future.

You have the right to review the results of the research if you wish to do so. A copy of the results may be obtained by contacting Nasr D. Abdrabo at nasr.abdrabo@aol.com or Phone: (831) 747-5946.

Additionally, should you have specific concerns or questions about this research, you may contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Afriye Quamina at Argosy University- San Francisco Bay Area –1005 Atlantic Ave, Alameda, CA 94501, by phone at (510) 217-4700 or email him at aquamina@argosy.edu or Dr. Sylnovie Merchant, IRB Chair, Argosy University- San Francisco Bay Area –1005 Atlantic Ave, Alameda, CA 94501, or by phone at (510) 217-4700, or email her at smerchant@argosy.edu

I have read and I understand the information explaining the purpose of this research and my rights and responsibilities as a participant. My signature below indicates my consent to voluntarily participate in this research, according to the terms and conditions outlined above.

Participant's Signature:	Date:
Print Name (First, Middle, Last):	

Appendix D

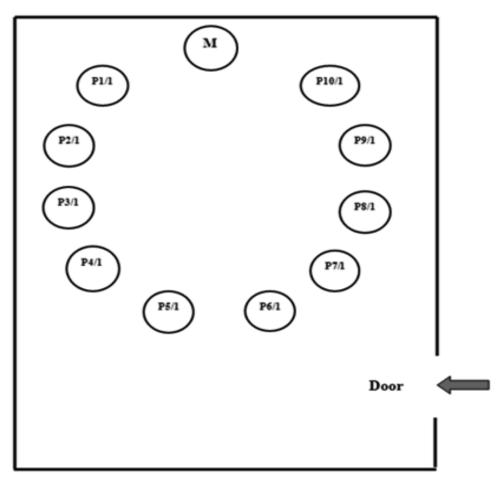
Data Collection Instrument

Focus Group Session Questions

- Q1. What does your teacher do to help you develop your listening comprehension (LC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q2. What does your teacher do to help you develop your reading comprehension (RC) during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q3. What does your teacher do to help you develop your speaking (SP) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q4. What does your teacher do to help you develop your writing (WR) skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q5. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your LC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q6. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your RC during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q7. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your SP skill during the Special Assistance sessions?
- Q8. What can your teacher do to improve the way s/he helps you develop your WR skill during the Special Assistance sessions?

Appendix E1 Focus Group A

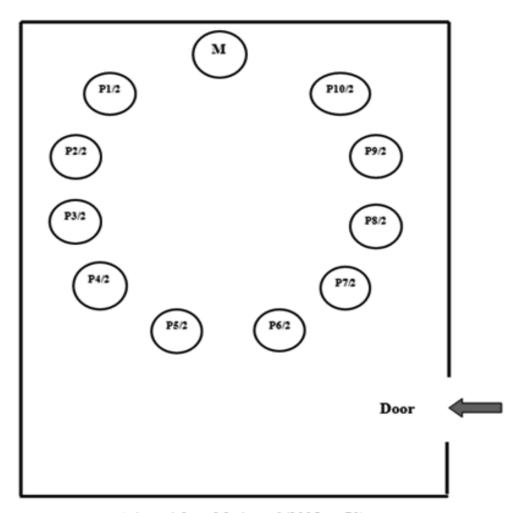
Date: 7 August 2013 Start time: 2:55 End time: 3:45 Site: Middle East School 1 Moderator: Nasr Abdrabo # of Participants: 10



Adapted from Mack et al (2005, p. 70)

Appendix E2 Focus Group B

Date: 8 August 2013
Start time: 2:55
Moderator: Nasr Abdrabo
End time: 3:45
of Participants: 10

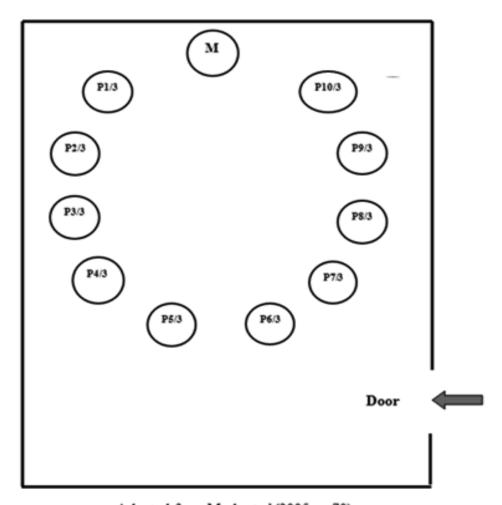


Adapted from Mack et al (2005, p. 70)

Appendix E3 Focus Group C

Date: 1 August 2013 Site: Middle East School III Start time: 2:55 Moderator: Nasr Abdrabo

End time: 3:45 # of Participants: 10



Adapted from Mack et al (2005, p. 70)



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER AND PRESIDIO OF MONTEREY MONTEREY CA 93944-3236

April 18, 2013

Institutional Review Board (IRB) U.S. Army Assurance: DOD A20209

Sylnovie Merchant, Ph.D. IRB Chair Argosy University 1005 Atlantic Ave. Alameda, CA 94501

Dear Dr. Merchant:

On behalf of the U.S. Army Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC), I am writing to formally indicate our awareness of a research project proposed by Mr. Nasr Abdrabo, a graduate student (School of Education) at Argosy University.

This research project, tentatively entitled Learner's Beliefs About the Strengths and Weaknesses of the Modern Standard Arabic Special Assistance Program in Semester One at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center has been reviewed and approved by the DLIFLC Scientific & Ethics Review Boards, by Dr. Jielu Zhao (DLIFLC Associate Provost for Undergraduate Education) and by Dr. Betty Leaver (DLIFLC Acting Provost). Dr. Zhao has endorsed the use of DoD military personnel as participants in Mr. Abdrabo's dissertation research project.

I have been informed that the Argosy IRB will conduct the review and maintain institutional oversight of this project. Once the Argosy IRB has completed its review of the project, I ask that a copy of the outcome of that review (and approval number) be send to me so we may maintain a folder on this project in our file of current research projects.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

J. Jeffrey Crowson, Ph.D.

IRB Chair

Professor, Educational Research

(831) 242-3788

jeffrey.j.crowson.civ@mail.mil



SAN FRANCISCO BAY AREA CAMPUS

July 28, 2013

Nasr D. Abdrabo 405 Combs Ct. Marina, CA 93933

Dear Nasr,

Thank you for addressing the IRB concerns and making the corrections to your application. Your application is now approved.

If you make changes in your protocol, you must use the form in the application. Changes must be signed by the chair and submitted for review before any changes are instituted.

Best wishes in your research.

Sincerely,

Sifn Part

Sylnovie Merchant, Ph.D.

Chair, Institutional Review Board

Argosy University, San Francisco Bay Area